

A photograph of a forest path with a bright light at the end, reflecting in a pond. The path is lined with tall, thin trees, and the light at the end creates a strong glow. The scene is reflected in a body of water in the foreground.

DR. GOHAR MUSHTAQ

**HIJAB:
LIBERATION OR
OPPRESSION?**

In Light of Scientific Research

The Hijab: Liberation or Oppression?

A Detailed Discussion in the Light of Scientific Research

حجاب المرأة المسلمة:
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Table of Contents

FOREWORD	7
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:.....	8
INTRODUCTION	10
CHAPTER 1.....	14
<i>WOMEN – THE FUNDAMENTAL BUILDING BLOCK OF SOCIETY</i>	14
THE POWER OF A POSITIVE MUSLIM WOMAN.....	19
AREAS IN WHICH WOMEN ARE BETTER THAN MEN.....	22
WOMEN ARE THE ONES WHO BIND FAMILIES	25
FEMINISM VERSUS MODERN SCIENCE.....	28
WHO SUFFERS AND WHO BENEFITS THE MOST FROM “WOMEN’S LIBERATION”?	29
CHAPTER 2.....	31
<i>EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN IN MODERN AGE</i>	31
PROBLEMS FACED BY THE LIBERATED WOMAN OF THE MODERN AGE	32
WOMEN’S LIBERATION OR DEGRADATION?	35
DEPICTION OF WOMEN AS SEX OBJECTS IN MEDIA AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS	37
BEAUTY & THE BEAST OF MEDIA.....	40
“WHEN BEAUTY BECOMES A SOCIAL PROBLEM” – EFFECTS OF MEDIA ON MALE JUDGMENTS	43
CHAPTER 3.....	47
<i>BOYS AND GIRLS GROW UP DIFFERENTLY – SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE.....</i>	47
BOYS AND GIRLS BRAINS DEVELOP DIFFERENTLY	48
BOYS AND GIRLS PLAY DIFFERENTLY	50
HORMONAL INFLUENCE ON MALE AND FEMALE BEHAVIOR	51
DIFFERENT EMOTIONAL PROCESSING IN MALES AND FEMALES	53
TESTOSTERONE – MALE HORMONE FOR SEX & AGGRESSION	54
CHAPTER 4.....	57

<i>BOYS AND GIRLS LEARN DIFFERENTLY – THE CASE FOR SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION</i>	57
PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM OF COEDUCATION	59
BOYS AND GIRLS LEARN DIFFERENTLY	60
BOYS AND GIRLS HEAR DIFFERENTLY	62
BOYS AND GIRLS BRAINS RESPOND TO STRESS DIFFERENTLY	64
LONG RANGE POISONOUS EFFECTS OF COEDUCATION	65
SEXUAL HARASSMENT SUFFERED BY GIRLS IN CO-ED SCHOOLS	68
HIGH RATES OF TEENAGE PREGNANCIES IN COED SCHOOLS.....	69
CAN GIRLS SEEK HIGHER EDUCATION FROM MALE TEACHERS?.....	71
THE SUCCESS OF SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION: PRACTICAL EVIDENCE.....	74
TESTIMONIALS FROM AROUND THE WORLD	74
CHAPTER 5	86
<i>MOTHERHOOD & THE HOME FRONT – RELIGIOUS & SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE</i>	86
MOTHER – THE FOUNDATION OF A FAMILY.....	88
BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF OUR CONNECTION TO OUR MOTHERS	92
NURTURING ROLE OF MOTHER.....	96
BREAST-FED IS BEST-FED	98
BREAST-FEEDING AND SOCIALIZATION OF A CHILD.....	100
BREAST-FEEDING AND HUMANIZATION OF A CHILD	103
MOTHER IN HOME – THE LAST BASTION AGAINST IMMORALITY	106
MOTHERHOOD, ORALITY AND LITERACY	107
CHILD DAYCARE CENTERS AND OLD AGE HOMES – A DIRECT PROPORTIONALITY	108
CHAPTER 6	111
<i>CAREER OR FAMILY – WHAT DO THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN WANT?</i>	111
WORK-FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN	112
HOUSEWIVES IN AMERICA – HAPPY OR UNHAPPY?	114
PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES IN WOMEN DURING MENSTRUAL CYCLES	118
EFFECTS OF BOTH PARENTS WORKING ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN	121
MEN ARE THE PROTECTORS OF WOMEN	124
A SOCIAL ENGINEERING EXPERIMENT ON A JEWISH SETTLEMENT AND ITS BACKFIRING	129
MEN OR WOMEN: WHO IS A BETTER HOME-MANAGER?	131

CHAPTER 7.....	134
<i>WHY SEPARATE-SEX GATHERINGS? WHY NOT MIX GATHERINGS?</i>	134
WOMEN ARE HAPPIER & MORE CONFIDENT IN SEPARATE-SEX GATHERINGS	135
ADOLESCENT GIRLS' CHOICE OF HOME AS A SAFE HAVEN	137
THE BLESSINGS OF SINGLE-SEX GATHERINGS – EXAMPLES FROM MUSLIM SOCIETIES	140
MEN'S MISPERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIORS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT.....	143
HIJAB AND THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF PRIVACY	146
CHAPTER 8.....	149
<i>HIJAB WITH OR WITHOUT NIQAB (FACE-VEIL)? IN LIGHT OF ISLAMIC SHARI'AH.....</i>	149
QUR'ANIC POSITION REGARDING HIJAB WITH NIQAB (FACE-COVERING)	152
EVIDENCE FROM THE PROPHETIC SAYINGS REGARDING HIJAB WITH NIQAB (FACE-COVERING)	164
POSITION OF THE COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET (PEACE BE UPON HIM).....	177
POSITION OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS REGARDING NIQAB	180
OBLIGATORY CONDITIONS FOR AN ISLAMIC HIJAB.....	191
HIJAB WITH OR WITHOUT NIQAB: IN CONCLUSION	194
CHAPTER 9.....	196
<i>NIQAB – IN LIGHT OF MODERN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH</i>	196
MODESTY & THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN.....	198
PURPOSE OF THE FACE VEIL – ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	200
HUMAN FACE – THE MOST IMPORTANT DETERMINANT OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS	202
WHAT WOMEN WANT – WHAT MEN WANT.....	205
“YOU CAN FEEL THEM LOOKING AT YOU” – WOMEN BY THEIR NATURE DO NOT LIKE MEN TO STARE AT THEM.....	210
ESCAPE FROM MALE GAZE SAVES GIRLS FROM INFERIORITY COMPLEX – SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE	215
COURTSHIP, DATING AND TESTING WATERS BEFORE MARRIAGE	218
MEN ARE VISUALLY AROUSED BUT WOMEN ARE NOT.....	225
MEDICAL BENEFITS OF WEARING THE NIQAB	227

CHAPTER 10.....	236
<i>NIQAB (FACE-VEIL) IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES BEFORE COLONIZATION</i>	236
COLONIALISM AND MUSLIM WOMEN’S VEIL	237
EVIDENCE OF MUSLIM WOMEN’S VEIL FROM EUROPEAN VISITORS AND TOURISTS	239
BREAKING THE MUSLIM WOMAN’S RESISTANCE BY REMOVING HER FACE-VEIL.....	245
THE CRUSADE AGAINST NIQAB IN THE MUSLIM COUNTRIES	249
CHAPTER 11.....	253
<i>LIBERATION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM</i>	253
ISLAM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR WOMEN	254
DOES NIQAB PREVENT MUSLIM WOMEN FROM GOING OUT IN PUBLIC?	260
BENEFITS OF WEARING NIQAB	263
NIQAB SAVES WOMEN FROM THE VISUAL THEFT OF MEN	266
FEMALE MUSLIM SHARI’AH SCHOLARS	269
WESTERN WOMEN COMING TO ISLAM IN GREATER NUMBERS THAN WESTERN MEN	275
CHAPTER 12.....	281
<i>STORIES OF WOMEN TURNING TO HIJAB & NIQAB</i>	281
THE RETURN OF HIJAB	281
THE STORY OF SISTER TARA BLACKTHORN	287
HOW I CAME TO LOVE THE VEIL – YVONNE RIDLEY.....	289
A VIEW THROUGH THE HIJAB – IMPRESSIONS OF A JAPANESE CONVERT TO ISLAM.....	294
WHY I SHED BIKINI FOR NIQAB: THE NEW SYMBOL FOR WOMEN’S LIBERATION.....	296
CHAPTER 13.....	301
<i>CLOSING REMARKS.....</i>	301
<i>THE MUSLIM WOMAN “UNVEILED” (A POEM ABOUT HIJAB).....</i>	304
<i>APPENDIX 1</i>	306
<i>GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS</i>	306

<i>APPENDIX 2</i>	311
BIBLIOGRAPHY	311
ARABIC, URDU AND ENGLISH BOOKS ON ISLAM	311
SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS & BOOKS BY WESTERN RESEARCHERS	317

Foreword

Dr. Gohar Mushtaq's book "*Hijab of a Muslim Woman: A Liberating Shield or Oppressive Clothing?*" is a scientific study on the social system of Islam. In it are ample proofs from the Qur'an, Sunnah and Islamic scholars on the importance of hijab in Islam. This book sheds light on the etiquettes of interactions between men and women in an Islamic society. Distinctively, much evidence from research published in prominent scientific journals is also presented in this book.

Dr. Mushtaq's book "*Hijaab of Muslim Women*" comes out at an opportune time when the issue of Muslim women's niqab (face-veil) is brewing in "liberal" countries such as France, Britain and Holland. It is strange that these so-called "secular" countries are so afraid of a "small piece of cloth" which Muslim women are using to cover their faces (i.e. niqab) to the extent that they are trying to ban wearing the niqab by Muslim women in public places. It is actually not the niqab (face-veil) but the pious and radiant face of the Muslim woman that these mighty countries are afraid of. It is indeed very strange! This is a much needed book at a time and age when eyes are dazzled by modernity, where modesty has lost its value and many Muslims have embraced the apologetic edition of the religion of Islam. "All praise is due to Almighty Allah, Lord of all the worlds!"

Maryam Jameelah¹
(Margaret Marcus)
Jan. 20th, 2011

¹ Maryam Jameelah is an American convert and a prominent female voice for Islam. She is the author of numerous books on Islam.

About the Author:

Dr. Gohar Mushtaq received his Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Technology from York College of The City University of New York (USA) where he was the valedictorian of his graduating class. Dr. Mushtaq received his doctorate in medical research from Rutgers University, U.S.A. From his childhood, he received thorough Islamic education from his father. Later on, he studied classical Islamic sciences from various Islamic teachers including Sheikh Abdur Rehman Kaashmiri (Brooklyn, New York), Sheikh Dr. Ismael Mehmood al-Azharee (New Jersey), Mufti Abdur Rehman ibn Yusuf (United Kingdom) and Imam Tarek Chebbi al-Tunisi (Florida).

The books of Dr. Mushtaq have a unique style much different from other Islamic books as his books provide boatload of scientific research from physical and social scientific journals with references to explain the wisdom of Islamic teachings. Part of the reason for this unique approach is that Dr. Mushtaq is a scientist who got training in scientific research by some of the best Western scientists. Dr. Mushtaq is a contributing author to nearly 50 scientific research papers published in peer-reviewed high impact scientific journals. Dr. Mushtaq frequently delivers Friday khutbahs (sermons) and lectures at various mosques and Islamic centers in the United States. He contributes articles to Al-Jumuah magazine (English), Batool (Urdu) and Mesaaq (Urdu) monthly magazines and is the author of the following books:

- ***The Intelligent Heart, The Pure Heart: An Insight into the Human Heart based on the Qur'an, Sunnah and Modern Science*** (Ta-Ha Publishers, London)
- ***Islam: Its Beauty & Wisdom*** (Amana Publications, Maryland, USA)
- ***The Music Made Me Do It – An In-Depth Study of Music through Islam and Science*** (IIPH, Riyadh)
- ***Growing a Beard: In Light of Qur'an, Sunnah and Modern Science*** (IIPH, Riyadh)
- ***Muslim Youth in the Age of Dajjal*** (IIPH, Riyadh)
- ***Encouraging Marriages and Discouraging Divorce – The Scientific Case for Marriage in Light of Quran and Sunnah***
(kalamullah.com)

Introduction

The aim of this book is to present a clear understanding of the nature of the correct relationship between men and women in social life and to appreciate the great design that the Creator wills to fulfill through both genders on Earth. This book also will prove by reason and argument that the moral concepts underlying the social system prevalent in the West are not only irrational, but are also loaded with fatal results for humanity. The social scientific research presented in this book will also draw our attention to the superiority of the laws of nature and will establish that family life and the nature-assigned division of labor among men and women alone can serve the will of God. Men and women have different natures and different functions. Civilization depends on understanding and respecting those differences.

Radical feminists have long contended that men and women are similar except for their reproductive functions and their bodies. According to radical feminists, most of the apparent differences between men and women are socially constructed and produced by the repressive environment.² Furthermore, using the seductive power of media, the Pied Piper of feminism has persuaded young people to abandon modesty and virginity.³ The same phenomenon can be seen in the Muslim countries where Muslim feminists and modernist scholars are stuck in the 1960s, claiming that there are no biological differences between men and women and, hence, we can create a unisex society. However, these claims are based less on scientific facts and more on personal beliefs or political agendas. Modernist and feminist Muslim

² Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

³ Graglia, Carolyn (1998). Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism. Dallas, Spence Publishing Company.

thinkers of today use catchy slogans to bring Muslim women out of hijab and the privacy of their homes into the market so that they can exploit or, better yet, 'sexploit' them. The slogans and promises of modernist Muslim Islamic scholars are very dazzling indeed, yet they are devoid of the true spirit of Islam.

In this time, when much of the world seems to be against Muslim family values, there was a need to write a book in light of modern social scientific research to clarify the position of women in Islam. In this book, I have made every attempt possible to support my contentions by research published in prestigious scientific journals. We now possess authentic scientific evidence which clearly demonstrates that the differences between men and women exist long before birth and have a deep biological basis. Today, scientists know these established scientific facts. However, the general public, which includes modernists and feminists in the Muslim world as well, are unaware of the new science of 'brain sex', i.e. male and female brains are constructed differently right in the womb of the mother, even before the child is born.

In modern culture, we notice some common characteristics concerning what is required of men and women. Men's dress consists of opaque clothing whereas feminine clothes are transparent. Modern society labels a man as improperly dressed when not in full suit but women are celebrated if they keep their legs uncovered. She is taught that "wearing the least" is something that builds her "status" in society. Males earn vast amounts of money by displaying female nakedness in commercial advertising, media and magazines. The female body is startlingly exploited in the media in every manner conceivable. The ill-effects of images projected through the television as well as other forms of media need no mention. Cultural critic Neil Postman argued that our image-based society is drunk on sensuality and that the cameras have turned on our children (especially young girls), robbing them of their innocence. Media in this modern age, writes Postman, "has played an enormous role, since it not only keeps the entire population in a condition

of high sexual excitement but stresses a kind of egalitarianism of sexual fulfillment: sex is transformed into a product available to everyone.”⁴

This is the age of “enlightenment” in which virginity is belittled and in which men have lost their natural instinct to protect the women of their family. It is to restore this lost moral value that I am writing this book – to accentuate the importance of the Islamic hijab. Contrary to common belief, Islam is the biggest benefactor of women in human history. Islamic commandments of hijab provide liberation, protection and shelter to women. By wearing a hijab, a Muslim woman covers her body in order to preserve herself from the outsider’s visual theft. Hijab provides a “moral raincoat” particularly useful under the stormy climate of modernity as it will be shown in great detail in this book.

In producing this work, I am indebted to many people who have encouraged and helped me in different ways. They deserve special mention here. I would like to express my special thanks to Imam Dr. Tarek Chebbi (from Tunis; now residing in Miami, Florida) for his patience in reading the manuscript of my book and his deep and insightful comments and discussions about it. My relationship as a student of Imam Chebbi developed when I performed my Hajj trip while he was the Imam of our group. Since then, I have benefited a lot from him. I am greatly indebted to Brother James Besada (an American Muslim convert) for his thought-provoking comments about the entire manuscript, even though he was under intense pressure from his studies at Madinah University. My indebtedness and gratitude must also be expressed to Maulana Junaid and Mufti Abdullah Nana for their valuable comments and suggestions on the final draft. I am thankful to my daughters Hadiyah and Hareem (ages 12 and 8) because their love for wearing the hijab encouraged me to write

⁴ Postman, Neil (1992). Conscientious Objections: Stirring up Trouble about Language, Technology and Education. New York, Vintage Books.

this book. Lastly, I am the most grateful to my wife Sadia because without her support and feminine intuition, this book might not have seen the light of day.

Chapter 1

Women – The Fundamental Building Block of Society

In the Qur'an, in the first verse of the chapter entitled “Women”, Allah says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ
وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ
عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا﴾

*“O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord
Who created you from a single soul and from it its
mate and from them both have spread abroad a
multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty
toward Allah in Whom you claim (your rights) of
one another, and towards the wombs (that bore
you). Lo! Allah has been a Watcher over you.”
(Surah An-Nisa: 1)*

Since men and women both come from the same essence, they are equal in their humanity. Islam, fourteen centuries ago, made women equally accountable to God in glorifying and worshipping Him – setting no limits on her moral

progress. The status of women in Islam is one of equality and honor. The Qur'an declared spouses to be each other's garments (Surah Al-Baqarah: 187). Islam regards the husband-wife relationship as complementary – the two spouses complete each other's personality. The social system of Islam is indeed the way of nature as it is based on Divine Guidance. We cannot live in this world by fighting against nature but by living in complete harmony with it. Social scientists and critics of the Western countries have reached the same conclusion today.

Although Western media reports often draw readers to conclude that Islam demeans and devalues women, the true teachings of Islam give women much respect, honor and rights. This is testified by the fact that among the people who embrace Islam in the Western countries, women outnumber men. Why is it that so many women who have been born and raised in Europe and America are willing to reject their 'liberty' only to embrace a religion that supposedly oppresses and enslaves them? Can Islam be prejudiced to women, and yet still appeal to them? Can Islam lower the status of a woman and still have more women embracing it as their way of life than men?

How can the cases of those women be explained? This cannot be a mere coincidence. Those Western women converts see some sort of freedom in Islam or else they would not have accepted a religion which devalues them. According to an article written by Lucy Berrington in the *Times Magazine* (London) dated 9th Nov. 1993: "It is even more ironic that most British converts should be women, given the widespread view in the West that Islam treats women poorly. In the United States, women converts outnumber men by four to one, and in Britain make up the

bulk of the estimated 10,000 to 20,000 converts, forming part of a Muslim community of 1 to 1.5 million.”⁵ In Germany for example, government officials estimated that 4,000 people converted to Islam in 2008, compared with an annual average of 300 in the late 1990. In Europe it is estimated that more than 50,000 people convert to Islam every year and the majority are women.⁶

Right at the time when Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came with the message “Be kind to your women”, the theologians in Europe were discussing whether women were merely a body or a body with a soul. That was the era when people in the West believed in the authenticity of the claim of Aristotle, who regarded women as biologically inferior to men because he was under the impression that women have fewer teeth than men!⁷

Islam granted such a high status to women that Allah revealed an entire Surah (chapter) in the Qur’an by the name of An-Nisa (meaning, the Women) and another Surah by the name of Maryam (the Arabic name for Mary, the mother of Prophet Jesus, peace be upon him) and a third one by the name of al-Mujaadilah (meaning, the Woman who pleads).

⁵ Berrington, Lucy. (Nov. 9, 1993). “The spread of a world creed” Times (London).

⁶ getreligion.org, retrieved December 27, 2010.

⁷ British philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russel remarked in his book *Impact of Science on Society* (published 1953 by Simon & Schuster, chap. 1): “Aristotle maintained that women have fewer teeth than men; although he was twice married, it never occurred to him to verify this statement by examining his wives' mouths.”

Islam grants women equal rights to contract, to enterprise, to earn and possess independently. Her life, her property, her honor are as sacred as those of a man. If she commits any offense, her penalty is no lesser or greater than that of a man's in a similar case. If she is oppressed or harmed, she gets due compensation equal to what a man in her position would get as mentioned in the Qur'an (Al-Baqarah 2: 195)

Islam never considered the presence of woman as an impediment in the spiritual evolution of man. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to perform late-night (*tahajjud*) prayers in his tiny room, and when he would descend into prostration he used to gently push aside the legs of his young wife Ayesha to make room. This harmonious, natural scene is very different from an ascetic monk worshipping alone in a temple's room.

The first person who embraced Islam and believed in the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a woman, the Prophet's wife Khadijah. The first Muslim to offer the sacrifice of life in the path of Allah was a woman named Sumayyah (the mother of the Prophet's companion Ammar bin Yaaser). Sumayyah was the first martyr of Islam. Ayesha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was such a brilliant scholar of Islam that great sahabah (companions of Prophet) used to study Islam from her and she would teach them from behind a curtain. She is one of the six sahabah who narrated the greatest number of traditions from Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). She narrated around 2,220 ahadeeth (traditions of the Prophet peace be upon him). Likewise, after the death of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the custodianship of the first Qur'anic text was entrusted not to a man but to a woman – the Prophet's wife, Hafsa.

Islam has always appreciated the femininity of the woman and regarded her as playing a role complementary to that of the man. The woman is different from the man, and the Qur'an accentuates that difference: "*And the male is not like the female*". [Surah Ale-Imran: 36] The difference does not mean that they are opponents of each other in any sense. They arise from each other and are for each other: "*you are from one another*" [Surah Ale-Imran: 195], and "*And Allah has given you wives of your own kind*". [Surah An-Nisa: 25] The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal in value to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and sameness are two quite different things. Men and women are not identical but they are created equally. This distinction between equality and sameness is extremely important. Equality is desirable and fair; but sameness is not. People are not created identical but they are created as equals. Bearing this distinction in mind, there is no room to imagine that woman is inferior to man. There is no ground to assume that she is less important than he just because they are not identical to each other. A woman is not a *male replica*. She has a distinct personality of her own and both men and women will be equally accountable for their own actions on the Day of Judgement.

Islam specifies different spheres of activities for men and women. In order for a healthy and proper atmosphere for a woman's relationship with a man, Islam has set its codes for women as well as men. In order to guard her femininity and save it from being oppressed, Islam tries to create a barrier between the woman and her degradation and protects her from the human wolves and predators in society. Islam acknowledges the inherent relative physical weakness of women compared to men and places the financial burden on men, to secure the costs of living and

the provision of her needs. Ideally, no basic need should compel a Muslim woman to leave her home and compete with other working men to win her bread – something that has befallen women in the West. A detailed discussion of these subjects will be presented in the following chapters.

The divine religion of Islam seeks to protect a woman's morals and decency, to guard her chastity against lascivious male gazes, and to foil evil hands that seek to harm her. In order to achieve these noble objectives, Islam commands Muslim men and women to lower their gazes and Muslim women to observe full hijab in order to preserve the chastity and purity of both genders.

The Power of a Positive Muslim Woman

In Islam, a woman enjoys certain privileges of which man is deprived. She is exempt from certain religious duties, i.e., prayers and fasting, during her regular menstrual periods and during postpartum bleeding. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honor in the sight of Allah. She is entitled to three-fourths of her children's love and kindness with one-fourth left for the father. As a wife, she is entitled to demand, through her wali (guardian), of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister, she is entitled to security and provision by her father and brother respectively. That is her privilege.

If she wishes to work or be self-supporting and participate in handling the family responsibilities, she is quite free to do so, provided her integrity and honor are safeguarded. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Both are members of one another. Allah Almighty says:

﴿فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَمَلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْتِي بِبَعْضِكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ﴾

*And their Lord hath heard them (and He said):
Lo! I suffer not that the work of any of you, male
or female, be lost. You proceed one from
another... (Surah Ale- Imran: 195)*

Sexual liberationists claim that society is based on male dominance which exploits women. As evidence, they claim that man's greater earning capacity results in exploitation of women. However, this claim is not necessarily true because economic productivity is not a measure of social control but represents, in actuality, social service. It is the female power on which the survival of society depends. A woman leaves an ever-lasting imprint on the economy of the social life through childbearing. As the economist and social critic George Gilder pointed out, women do not control the economy of the marketplace but rather they control the economy of the life force in our society. Values such as happiness, creativity, energy and morality are fundamental in any society. When they deteriorate, "all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put them back together again."⁸

⁸ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

Islamic history is filled with examples of positive Muslim women who left an indelible stamp on the pages of history. Those women stayed at their homes but their influence far exceeded many men of their society. For instance:

- The first person on this earth who believed in the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a woman – his wife Khadijah.
- The first person on this earth who performed *salaat* (prayers) behind Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was also a woman – his wife Khadijah.
- The first Muslim in Islam to be killed in the path of Allah was a woman, Summayah, the mother of Ammar bin Yaasir.
- Umar bin Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, whose entrance into Islam strengthened the oppressed Muslims of Makkah accepted Islam because of his sister Fatimah bint Khattab.
- The first written copy of complete Qur'an (*mushaf*) was kept in the custody of a woman – Hafsa, the daughter of Umar bin Khattab. The reason is that the Qur'an regards pious women as “*haafidhatul ghayb*” حَافِظَاتُ الْغَيْبِ (those guarding the unseen) [Surah an-Nisa: 34].⁹

⁹ This is referring to the verse in the Qur'an: “Therefore, the righteous women are obedient (to the husband), and guard the unseen (in their husband's absence) what Allah would have them guard.” (Surah An-Nisa: 34) Similarly, it has been mentioned in a hadeeth narrated by Ibn Abbas in which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “*The best wife is she who, if you look at her, will please you; who, if you bid her to do something, will obey; and who will safeguard herself and your property in your absence.*” [Imam Suyyuti has graded this hadeeth as saheeh in his *Jaami as-Sagheer* (hadeeth # 1774). Imam Abu Dawud has quoted this hadeeth in his *Sunan Abu Dawud* (hadeeth # 1664) and he remained silent about it which implies that this hadeeth is authentic. Moreover, Abdul Haqq al-Ashbaylee has

Interestingly, there is not a single hadeeth which has been rejected from a woman on account of her being a fabricating liar. Imam Dhahabi affirms: "There are many men who have fabricated Hadeeth (traditions or sayings of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him). However, no woman in the history of Islam has been accused of fabrication."¹⁰ In light of this, if the intellectual integrity of anyone should be questioned, it should be that of men. Women have always truthfully conveyed religious knowledge in the history of Islam.

Areas in which Women are better than Men

Islam acknowledges the fact that men and women are not identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no room to imagine that a woman is inferior to a man. There are certain areas where men excel women and other areas where women are better than men. For this reason, Islam generally specifies different spheres

graded this hadeeth as saheeh in his *Al-Ahkaam as-Sughraa* (#360).

Imam Nawawi has graded this hadeeth as saheeh in its chain of transmission in his book *Al-Khulaasa* (vol. 2, no. 1076).]

Hence, a righteous woman guards her husband's property, honor and reputation as well as her own modesty and chastity in his absence. Since this quality of righteous women of "guarding the unseen" has been described in the Qur'an and hadeeth, it is very likely that such women will safeguard their senses against committing sins. Such women will safeguard the knowledge of Islam and transfer it uncorrupted to the next generations.

¹⁰ Al-Dhahabi, Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmed (2007). Kitab Tadhkirat al-huffaz (The Memorial of the Hadeeth Masters). Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah.

of activities for men and women.

Today, modern scientific research has shown that women are more sensitive than men in their senses. It has been shown that women and girls are better than men in their hearing abilities.¹¹ Women are also superior to men in their verbal abilities. Girls speak earlier than boys during their development. They also start reading earlier than boys. Girls are verbally much more fluent than boys. For this reason, speech disorders such as stuttering are much more likely to be found among boys.¹² In reality, in girls, the brain centers that are related to language abilities are six (6) years more advanced as compared to those centers in boys.¹³

Girls, whether children or grown ups, are very adept at face-reading. It has been demonstrated in scientific experiments that 3½-year old girls have the ability to interpret facial expressions better than 5-year old boys.¹⁴ Indeed, compared

¹¹ Garai, J. E. and Scheinfeld, A. (1968). "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits." Genetic Psychology Monographs **77**: 169-299.

¹² Durden-Smith, J. & De Simone, D. (1983). Sex and the Brain. London, Pan Original.

¹³ Hanlon, Harriet, Robert Thatcher and Marvin Cline (1999). "Gender Differences in the Development of EEG Coherence in Normal Children." Developmental Neuropsychology **16(3)**: 479-506.

¹⁴ Boyatzis, Chris, Chazan, E. & Ting, C.Z. (1993). "Preschool children's decoding of facial emotions." Journal of Genetic Psychology **154**: 375-382.

to men, women attach much more importance to the interpersonal aspects of life.

Women can see better in the dark whereas men can see better in bright light. In addition, women have better visual memory than men.¹⁵ Due to their superior visual memory, women are often better than men in decorating the home and remembering the decorative styles inside a home. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that women have much better sense of taste compared to men.¹⁶ Therefore, in general, women are better than men in preparing tastier dishes. No doubt that there is no replacement for a mother at home who cooks the food for her family.

Women's intuitive power is much stronger than that of men. They can notice things which men's radar screen of senses can easily miss. Due to their superior perception, women are better at grasping social cues or picking up important clues just from the tones of voice.¹⁷ Geneticist Anne Moir observes: "Men sometimes become exasperated at a woman's reaction to what they say. They do not realize that women are probably 'hearing' much more than what the man himself thinks he is 'saying'. Women tend to be better

¹⁵ McGuinness, D. (1976). "Sex Differences in Organization, Perception and Cognition." Exploring Sex Differences, Lloyd, B. & Archer, J. (eds.). London, Academic Press. pp. 123-155.

¹⁶ Garai, J. E. and Scheinfeld, A. (1968). "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits." Genetic Psychology Monographs **77**: 169-299.

¹⁷ Bardwick, J. P. (1971). The Psychology of Women. New York, Harper Row.

judges of character.”¹⁸ In this regard, when it comes to the upbringing and character building of a child, no one is better equipped than a mother to perform this huge task. If a mother leaves her home in search of a career while leaving her children at the day-care center, the task of a child’s character-building will be negatively impacted.

To sum up, women are better equipped to receive a wider range of sensory information, to use that information in the best way and to establish primacy of personal relationships. Women are naturally better equipped than men to respond to the baby’s needs. With their sharper senses of touch, sound, smell and intuition, it is the mother rather than the father who can understand the needs of a crying baby or get the non-verbal hint by doing face reading of an upset child. Women are no doubt superior and better equipped than men for the monumental task of child-rearing and home-managing.

Women are the Ones who Bind Families

Women are naturally more affectionate and caring than men. For men, power comprises dominance and, sometimes, aggression. Unfortunately, feminist women have adopted this definition of power and applied it to women. However, in reality, the power of women is more delicate in nature – the power of a woman lies in building relationships, binding families together and building societies. Women as wives have certain qualities which are lacking in men. Anne Moir accentuates the paramount role

¹⁸ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

of women in saving marriages:

“Marriages work, against all odds, not because women are submissive, and accommodate their domineering males; marriages work because women’s natural social skills – it’s been called ‘social intelligence’ – enable them to manage a relationship so much better than a man.”¹⁹

Hence, in a marital relationship, a woman is not just a subordinate to her husband but she is the one who keeps the family together due to her compassionate and caring nature and her superior social skills. Indeed, women are more socially intelligent than men. After all, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told his followers about the importance of a good wife in one hadeeth as follows:

الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعٌ وَخَيْرُ مَتَاعِهَا الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ

(صحيح مسلم، كتاب النكاح)

"The whole world is a field of benefits, and the best of its benefits is the righteous woman." (Sahih Muslim)²⁰

In fact, nothing in this world is as valuable as a pious woman.

Nature has undoubtedly assigned different roles and duties to men and women. It is women who give a sense of purpose in life to men. Women transform male lust into

¹⁹ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

²⁰ Muslim, Imam Ibn al-Hajjaj Ibn Muslim al-Qashiree (1981) Sahih Muslim. Lahore, Khalid Ihsan Publishers. *Kitaab an-Nikaah (The Book of Marriage)* (Chapter 37: The good of this world is the pious woman)

love. Women channel the potential undefined energies of men into the right direction as pointed out by George Gilder:

“Women conceive the future that men tend to flee; they feed the children that men ignore.... Only she can give significance to his most powerful drives.”²¹

In every society of the world, more men are on the highest position jobs compared to women. Men are much more likely to be the CEOs of major corporations, even though there is no shortage of highly educated women these days. Men are more likely to start their own businesses. Men are more likely to be leading politicians. In the field of inventions, men are far ahead of women. In the present age, 99 percent of all patents are registered by men. Similarly, men earn more than women. For instance, the salary of an average woman in the U.S. is only 73 percent of the average salary of an average man.²² Because of their risk-taking nature or perhaps because they tend to be freer of domestic and child-rearing duties, men appear to control the economy of the society. But we have to understand that men and women are different and the sphere of their duties is different. Women control another type of economy – the economy of the life force – which is so crucial to determine the level of happiness, morality and solidarity in society.

²¹ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

²² Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

Feminism versus Modern Science

In recent decades, two contradictory phenomena have happened: 1) scientific discoveries have repeatedly shown that men and women are different – psychologically and biologically – and the two genders are good in different spheres of life, and 2) feminists have continued to deny that such differences exist between males and females.

In the early twentieth century, scientific studies conducted in the U.S.A. had shown that there existed remarkable gender differences. It was shown that women are better than men in their hearing ability, have more conventional vocabulary and prefer handling practical problems. Men, on the other hand, have more adventurous vocabulary and prefer abstract and general thought.²³

As the feminist movement gained momentum in the U.S.A. and elsewhere in the world in the 1960s and onwards, they started rejecting gender differences and started to claim that children are, in social and psychological terms, born gender-neutral and it is the family and society which ‘socially engineers’ them into the stereotypical roles of males and females. Interestingly, just at the time when feminists and sexual liberals were propounding their views, the science of brain sex started to emerge. As we shall see in this book, recent scientific discoveries have clearly demonstrated that the differences between men and women exist long before birth and they have a deep biological basis. As the British female scientist Anne Moir has rightfully argued, for the past few decades we have been trying to

²³ Garai, J. E. and Scheinfeld, A. (1968). "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits." Genetic Psychology Monographs 77: 169-299.

construct our society on the great biological lie that men and women are similar. Today, we know the truth.

Who Suffers and Who Benefits the Most from “Women’s Liberation”?

Germaine Greer, a world-renowned feminist, published *The Whole Woman* in 1999, a sequel to her notorious book *The Female Eunuch* published thirty years earlier. In *The Whole Woman*, Greer discusses what she sees as the lack of fundamental progress in the feminist movement, and criticizes some sections of the women's movement for illusions on that score. Greer further admits that the sexual liberation that came along with the gender revolution has done harm to *women* more than men. She argues: “The sexuality that has been freed is male sexuality.”²⁴ According to Greer, sexual liberation harms women more than men – women continue to experience the huge consequences of pregnancy while men largely escape them.

Another end result of sexual liberation is the increased divorce rate and rise in single parenthood. Again, it is women who end up taking on most of the burden. Greer states: “In 1971, one in twelve British families was headed by a single parent, in 1986 one in seven, and by 1992 one in five.”²⁵ Another consequence of the sexual revolution has been the pain of loneliness and women are the ones who are the predominant victims of it, not men as Greer notes: “By the year 2020 a third of all British households will be

²⁴ Greer, Germaine (2000). The Whole Woman. New York, Anchor Books. pg. 10

²⁵ Ibid. pg. 213

occupied by a single individual, and the majority of those individuals will be female.”²⁶ The burden upon women created by “single parenting” is one of the most brutal forms of oppression in the age of the “liberation of women”. There are trials and tribulations in marital life just like there are tests in every lifestyle. However, the solution does not, in most cases, lie in seeking divorce. Phyllis Schlafly, America’s most articulate opponent of radical feminism, gave the following advice to her fellow women in her book *Feminist Fantasies*: “If you complain about servitude to a husband, servitude to a boss will be more intolerable. Everyone in the world has a boss of some kind. It is easier for most women to achieve a harmonious working relationship with a husband than with a foreman, supervisor, or office manager.”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid. pg. 261

²⁷ Schlafly, Phyllis (2003). Feminist Fantasies. Dallas, Spence Publishing Company.

Chapter 2

Exploitation of Women in Modern Age

The purpose of Islamic hijab is to protect the morality of men and women and to close the door to all evils which result from the free mixing of the sexes in society. Islam liberates women from the exploitation of society. Yet the flag bearers of western civilization claim that they and only they are the ones who are liberating the women. However, a careful look reveals that the exploitation of women in western society is unprecedented in history. In western societies, sexual freedom and the sexual revolution has borne its bitter fruit with the dissolution of the barriers separating men and women and the resultant effects which involve moral decay, decrease in marriage rates, high divorce rates, disintegration of the family system and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Statistics on the increasing rates of pregnant school girls in the United States are alarming.

One has to sincerely question what is being offered to women in western societies in the name of liberation - is it liberation or libertinism? Libertinism refers to a lifestyle or pattern of behavior characterized by self-indulgence and lack of restraint, especially one involving sexual promiscuity and rejection of religious or other moral authority. A careful look at the plight of women in western

culture reveals what we see around us – on bill boards, front covers of glossy magazines, advertisements, TV shows, movies, etc., where every inch of space is being filled with the display of the female body – that is not women's liberation but only women's libertinism as we shall see in more detail in this chapter.

Problems Faced by the Liberated Woman of the Modern Age

Exploitation of women from the old ages to the present has not really changed– only the methods have changed, under a new guise. Women in the West have surely not achieved any sort of liberation. We now know that 75% of all rapes are committed by men who know their victims personally. At workplaces, men abuse their positions in power to exploit women. The most important cause of divorce is adultery, which occurs due to free mixing of the sexes. The major reason behind teenage pregnancies and teens losing their virginity in schools is the coeducational schooling system. The abortion rate in the Western countries is unprecedented in human history.²⁸

Never before in the history of humanity has there been a society in which men and women mixed so freely and where pornography was presented so copiously in the form of seductive art, such as on bill boards, glossy magazines, TV, the internet, iPods, advertisement-flyers, to name only a few. Today in this age of 'enlightenment,' the feminine

²⁸ Patel, Ismael Adam (1997). Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.

body is exploited or “sexploited”, and displayed in such abundance that it is extremely hard for any sane person to protect the chastity of his/her eyes.

Today, divorce has become the least of the problems faced by the liberated women of our modern age. From anorexia to date-rape, from teenage girls finding themselves miserably pregnant to single “liberated” women in their 40s longing for children; this culture has not been kind to women. Germaine Greer rejected marriage and motherhood in favor of career through out her life. However, after turning forty, Greer wrote in the British magazine *Aura*:

“I was desperate for a baby and I have the medical bills to prove it. [Greer tried fertility treatments including artificial insemination.] I still have pregnancy dreams, waiting for something that will never happen.”²⁹

And it has been happening at the very moment when it is claimed that the modern woman has been liberated – liberated from not just her home, but also from the family and husband. The plight of the modern, liberated female is so bad that many staunch feminist intellectuals are admitting the fact that modern women are more oppressed than ever before. Mary Pipher is an American psychologist and an avowed feminist. In her book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, after hearing hundreds of stories and cases of self-mutilation from her adolescent-girl clients, psychologist Pipher concluded that “girls are having more trouble now than they had thirty years ago, when I was a girl, and more trouble than even ten years ago... Girls today are much more oppressed. They are

²⁹ Greer, Germaine (May 2000). "My Battle for a Baby." *Aura* 1.

coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture.” And “as they navigate a more dangerous world, girls are less protected.”³⁰ This is all because, in the age of sexual revolution, modern society has lost its respect for female modesty.

In the words of Shariffa Carlos: “It is not oppression to protect yourself and society; it is oppression to voluntarily throw yourself into the quagmire while denying it is dirty.”³¹ Mohammad Al-Shareef, a Canadian Islamic scholar, rightfully asks the question to the modernist thinkers of today:

“Why is it that they want to liberate young beautiful women? Why don't they liberate the seniors? Why don't they liberate the indigenous? Why don't they liberate the inmates? Why is their target audience young and skinny and tall women (their definition of beauty) between the ages of 13 – 28? And why is their first call for you to take off your Hijab?”³²

Is it because we are attempting to construct an artificial society where gender roles are blurred between males and females – a society which does not take into consideration the nurturing role of a mother and the bread-winning role of a father? Today, modern science tells us that men and women are biologically and psychologically different right

³⁰ Pipher, Mary (1994). Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls. New York, Ballantine Books.

³¹ Carlos, Shariffa. “When I Covered My Head, I Opened My Mind” (<http://www.themodernreligion.com/women>)

³² Alshareef, Mohammad. “How a Pearl Develops” (<http://www.kalamullah.com/sisters01.html>)

from their birth and this difference stays for the rest of their lives. We shall see this in the next few chapters.

Women's Liberation or Degradation?

What is called “women's liberation” in reality is not liberation but, in fact, degradation. It is media's sexploitation of women. Women were oppressed in the “bad old days” but has the “new woman” of the modern age overcome that oppression? Has liberation achieved real emancipation of women from injustice? The fact of the matter is that the oppression of women is still present but is now under a new guise backed up by media and catchy slogans of women's liberation and feminism.

Nowadays, instead of killing innocent girls at birth, people use modern technology to abort the baby under the name of “pro-choice” as opposed to “pro-life”. Women with children are still abandoned as used to happen in previous centuries. Now the phenomenon is given an attractive label of “single parent families”. In the modern age, instead of being sold in the market as slave-girls, women sell their bodies to the capitalists and media under the guise of models, singers and actresses. In any society, the words used by people have moral power over them and they have the ability to arouse feelings of shame or guilt in the people. Modern secular and nihilistic culture is quite aware of this fact. In western society, such terms, which create feelings of shame or guilt among the public, are very skillfully eliminated and, instead, replaced by such terms which are sweet sounding and do not carry any moral connotations.

The biggest institution of the degradation of women under the guise of liberation is that of pornography. Women are told that they can do whatever they want with their bodies. This institution is opposed by most of feminists as an objectification and dehumanization of women but this did not result in the decline of pornography. Germaine Greer, for example, admits that “after thirty years of feminism there is vastly more pornography, disseminated more widely than ever before.”³³ Greer and other feminist thinkers pinpoint the fashion industry as a major contributor to the contemporary enslavement of women. Although it is claimed that the fashion industry exists for the gratification of women, in reality, as Greer rightfully points out, it is heavily controlled by men who persuade women to denude or adorn themselves to add to a public display created mainly for men.

The consequences of the new pressures on women are unprecedented in human history. Old school feminists may tell us that the liberated women of today lead richer lives. However, modern feminists also accept the fact that women of today are under much more pressure and lead a sadder life than before. Greer states: “Since 1955 there has been a five-fold increase in depressive illness in the US. For reasons that are anything but clear women are more likely to suffer than men.... [for example] 17 percent of British women will try to kill themselves before their twenty-fifth birthday.”³⁴ In order to fight depression and sadness,

³³ Greer, Germaine (2000). The Whole Woman. New York, Anchor Books.

³⁴ Greer, Germaine (2000). The Whole Woman. New York, Anchor Books.

modern women resort to anti-depressive drugs; this again goes in favor of the capitalists, who own the pharmaceutical companies. Prozac is increasingly prescribed to women and prozac is the same anti-depressant drug that is regularly given to zoo animals to help them overcome their sense of futility and entrapment. Now the question is: Is this all women's liberation or 'entrapment'?

Depiction of Women as Sex Objects in Media and its Psychological Effects

It seems quite strange that in Western societies, where non-marital sex is freely available, rape is a more serious problem compared to Muslim societies. There are psychological reasons for this. There is no doubt that the widespread depiction of women in pornography increases the incidences of rape in a society. Feminists and women's liberation movement leaders have long argued that men and women are exactly alike and women can do anything, go anywhere, say anything, and wear anything, without having to face any undesirable consequences. In addition, they have attempted to destroy the traditional family system in which women had the protection of their fathers and brothers. The results of such futile attempts to change basic human nature have been terrible.³⁵

In a society in which there is extensive availability of pornographic material and widespread exposure to the

³⁵ Paglia, Camille (1992) Sex, Art, and American Culture New York, Vintage Books. Quoted in: Afzaal, Dr. Ahmed A Wake-Up Call: Reflections on Media, Freedom & Morality, (www.tanzeem.org.pk/research).

depiction of women as sex objects on bill-boards advertisements, TV and internet commercials, magazines, etc., an abnormal strain is placed on male sexuality constantly preoccupying men with sexual performance. Furthermore, in all these media, women are always depicted as always sexually ready, willing and eager; those women may even be shown as enjoying rape, physical torture and humiliation in some cases.³⁶ As a consequence, male viewers and readers in such an environment of high sexual excitement begin to perceive acts of sexual violence and coercion as normal, everyday practices. These factors in combination with the natural aggressiveness of men lead to the unfortunate incidents of rape.³⁷

Even in normal circumstances, when the bodies of women become uncovered in society, it has far reaching and devastating psychological effects on men. According to a research study by psychologist Douglas Kenrick, men who are shown pictures of *Playboy* models, later describe themselves as less in love with their wives than do men shown other images. In research published in the 1989 issue of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, psychologist Kenrick and his associates at Arizona State University studied the effects of exposure of opposite sex erotica on male and female subjects. According to the

³⁶ Brod, Harry (Fall 1988) "Pornography and the Alienation of Male Sexuality". Social Theory and Practice. Quoted in: Afzaal, Dr. Ahmed A Wake-Up Call: Reflections on Media, Freedom & Morality, (www.tanzeem.org.pk/research).

³⁷ Gordon, George N., (1980) Erotic Communications New York, Hastings House. Quoted in: Afzaal, Dr. Ahmed A Wake-Up Call: Reflections on Media, Freedom & Morality, (www.tanzeem.org.pk/research).

researchers, “exposure to the unusually attractive and well-proportioned beauties in magazines” may skew the perception of beauty of an ordinary person. As a result, such a twisted perception “could lead to invidious comparisons between media beauties and ‘real world’ lovers who are, on average, less attractive than models in *Playboy* or *Playgirl*.”³⁸ Interestingly, the researchers also observed that the finding of lower ratings for a person’s spouse was found true only for males and not for females. This finding can be easily understood in light of the fact that males are generally more promiscuous and more interested in new partners. Moreover, physical attractiveness appears to be a more central criteria for males’ sexual responses than it is for females.

These findings tell us that when the body of a woman is exposed in society as a sex commodity, it undermines the value of a wife and the institution of family. By the depiction of women as sex objects on the media, men are negatively conditioned and they begin to judge their own wives based on the standards of feminine beauty depicted on the media. Another reason that has not been pointed out by the researchers as to why men viewing erotic media rate their wives as less after watching the media is that when women are depicted as models in the media, they are stripped of their worth as a human being and, instead, they are depicted as sex commodities, which can be bought and sold. After all, those men purchase those magazines which contain pictures of beautiful models. Consequently, those

³⁸ Kenrick, Douglas T., Sara E. Gutierrez & Laurie L. Goldberg (1989). "Influence of Popular Erotica on Judgments of Strangers and Mates." Journal of Experimental Social Psychology **25**: 159-167.

males begin to think of their wives as sex objects also and not as their cherished life partners. On the other hand, in a Muslim society in which female bodies are not openly displayed on billboards, magazines, TV advertisements, etc., women retain their actual worth and men think of them as fellow human beings, not as objects to be displayed. In other words, when a woman is covered in society, there is more protection for her. As Wendy Shalit points out in her book *A Return to Modesty*:

“We depend, in other words, on male respect for the fact that we probably want to be more sexually discriminating than they. A respect for female modesty was a woman’s natural bodyguard, invisible and free of charge. Thanks to the attack on modesty, and the attack on male respect for it, now only rich or famous women can feel safe.”³⁹

Beauty & the Beast of Media

In modern societies, men are the ones who establish the criterion of beauty and they keep on “devaluating” this “currency” so quickly that it is not possible for women to catch up with those “man-made” standards. Ismael Adam Patel expounds this in his *Islam: the Choice of Thinking Women*:

“There are no universal standards: “beauty” is an imaginary idol created by the Western male, who raises and changes its standards at whim, thereby making it impossible for his mother, sister or daughter to attain it. Women's beauty has nothing to do with women: it is all about men's institutions and power....

³⁹ Shalit, Wendy (1999). *A Return To Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*. New York, The Free Press.

As the white middle-class women threw away their aprons and marched out of their front doors in pursuit of liberation, they fell straight into the trap of the capitalist beauty parlour. The capitalist market has manipulated women to spend over \$33 billion a year on diet products, \$20 billion on cosmetics, \$300 million on cosmetic surgery, and over \$7 billion on pornography.”⁴⁰

The beauty myth of women is created by the joint alliance of capitalist fashion industry and media. The survival of the fashion industry and the media’s advertisement industry depend upon the exploitation of the flesh of women. The fashion industry brainwashes women to believe that nudity and low body weight are an expression of liberation. Similarly, western media has made female bodies public property and “female fat is the subject of intense public debate.”⁴¹ Women who gain weight feel guilty about themselves because they are conditioned from early age to believe that the beauty of their bodies needs to be exposed, as if their bodies do not belong to them but to society at large.

The beast of media plays a major role in creating an inferiority complex in women of all ages about their physical appearance. Celebrity women’s photographs and pictures in the media, magazine’s and billboards are glamorized by the process of “retouching or “computer imaging” in such a way that a 50 year old women is made to look like a 30 year old and a 60 year old woman to look

⁴⁰ Patel, Ismael Adam (1997). Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.

⁴¹ Ibid.

like she's 40. Bob Ciano, an art director at *Life* magazine, says that, "no picture of a woman goes unretouched... Even a well known older woman who doesn't want to be retouched... We still persist in trying to make her look like she's in her fifties".⁴² What are the effects of such censorship and manipulation of images? According to photography expert Heyn, "by now readers have no idea what a real woman's 60 year old face looks like in print because it's made to look 45. Worse, 60 year old readers look in the mirror and think they look too old, because they are comparing themselves to some retouched face smiling back at them from a magazine. Women's culture is an adulterated, inhibited medium".⁴³

This is not a superficial issue. What has been mentioned in the above lines shows how the media by using its seductive force instills an inferiority complex in the minds of unsuspecting women in society. By displaying "retouched" images of women, the media portrays idealized, unattainable types of women on the screen and, hence, keep the society in a state of emotional thirst. Social critic Ismael Adam Patel notes this form of female oppression: "To make women look younger, thinner and more curvaceous is to erase women's true identity, worth, power and history. This is the most damaging type of oppression and women in the West are slowly waking up to it. This is one reason why

⁴² Quoted in: Patel, Ismael Adam (1997). Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.

⁴³ Quoted in: Patel, Ismael Adam (1997). Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.

young educated women in the West have found the sincere teachings of Islam to be so attractive.”⁴⁴

“When Beauty Becomes a Social Problem” – Effects of Media on Male Judgments

Various behavioral and psychological studies have shown that men are visually aroused while women are not. Men can be easily aroused by looking at beautiful females and, in this regard, men show much greater agreement among themselves in ranking the beauty of females. Women, on the other hand, are not generally aroused when they look at handsome males. The criterion used by women in the selection of mates is dependant on the socio-economic status of men much more than on the mere looks of men.

One of the destructive effects of free mixing of men and women and especially the media's sexploitation of women is the complete distortion of the concept of female beauty in the eyes of men when it comes to real life situations. There is ample evidence in the realm of social scientific research which shows that when men are exposed to beautiful females in the media, such men develop very idealistic concepts of female beauty. Douglas T. Kenrick of Montana State University and Sara E. Gutierrez of Arizona State University did a few studies which were later published in the 1980 issue of *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.⁴⁵ In one of the studies, 81 male

⁴⁴ Patel, Ismael Adam (1997). Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women. London, Ta-Ha Publishers.

⁴⁵ Kenrick, Douglas T. and Sara E. Gutierrez (1980). "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness: When

dormitory residents at Montana State University were asked to judge a potential blind date for a fellow dormitory resident. One group of subjects was students who were watching a popular TV program, whose main characters were strikingly beautiful females. The other (control) group consisted of male residents of the same dormitory who were not watching this show at the time the study was done on them. When asked to rate a photo of an average female (described as a potential blind date for another dorm resident), the male students who were watching beautiful females on the TV rated the target female as significantly less attractive than did the males in the control group.

In a second study by the same scientists, the judges were 48 male undergraduate students at Montana State University. In this experiment, a black and white slide of an attractive female model in a magazine advertisement was shown to one group of males while the control group of males was not shown anything. Then, all the subjects were shown a slide of a female of average attractiveness and were given a “personality rating” sheet to fill out on her. The ratings indicated that she was seen as significantly less beautiful by the subjects exposed to the attractive female model in the advertisement. In discussing the results of this study, Kenrick and Gutierrez write: “The present results support the suggestion that our initial impressions of potential romantic partners will be adversely affected if we happen to have been recently exposed to posters, magazines,

Beauty Becomes a Social Problem." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **38**(1): 131-140.

television, or movies showing highly attractive individuals (or if such stimuli are concurrently present).”⁴⁶

Similarly, in another study conducted by social psychologists at Arizona State University, the influence of exposure to centerfold erotica on sexual attraction judgments was investigated. Again, in this study, it was found that physical attractiveness appeared to be a more central criterion for males’ sexual responses than for the females. As the researchers concluded: “Looking at gorgeous opposite sex centerfolds seems to have made attractiveness more salient as a criterion for mate satisfaction, but for male subjects only.”⁴⁷

The fact of the matter is that females depicted in the media do not represent average females in of society; “Media females are indeed selected from a highly skewed distribution with regard to physical attractiveness.”⁴⁸ On top of that, the images of media females go through a whole process of retouching of the photographs or extreme

⁴⁶ Kenrick, Douglas T. and Sara E. Gutierres (1980). "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness: When Beauty Becomes a Social Problem." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **38**(1): 131-140.

⁴⁷ Kenrick, Douglas T. Sara E. Gutierres and Goldberg, Laurie L. (1989). "Influence of Popular Erotica on Judgments of Strangers and Mates." Journal of Experimental Social Psychology **25**: 159-167.

⁴⁸ Kenrick, Douglas T. and Sara E. Gutierres (1980). "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness: When Beauty Becomes a Social Problem." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **38**(1): 131-140.

makeup before being presented to the public. As a result, not only do average women in society feel an inferiority complex towards their facial beauty when compared to the artificially-constructed “female media beauty”, but the result is equally devastating for the males who are exposed to those female images in the media. In light of this research, we can easily understand the situation of those Muslim youth who are always exposed to movies, TV dramas, glossy magazines and internet when they have a hard time accepting the bride of their parent’s choice in arranged marriages just because she is not as beautiful as the media female. Similarly, married men who continuously expose themselves to the onslaughts of the media and do not lower their gaze when media females are shown, eventually lose interest in their wives and try to engage in *haraam* activities which lead to adultery.

Chapter 3

Boys and Girls Grow Up Differently – Scientific Evidence

“The bottom line is that the brain is just organized *differently* in females and males. The tired argument about which sex is more intelligent or which sex has the ‘better’ brain is about as meaningful as arguing about which utensil is ‘better’ a knife or a spoon. The only correct answer to such a question is: ‘Better for what?’ A knife is better than a spoon if you want to cut through a piece of meat, while a spoon is better if you’re facing a bowl of chicken broth.”⁴⁹

(Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.)

FEMINISTS ARE ALWAYS BLOWING the trumpet that men and women are exactly similar and gender roles in a society are the product of social conditioning. If we can somehow re-engineer that conditioning through social engineering, we will be able to reverse the gender roles. However, a social engineering experiment conducted on a kibbutz (Jewish settlement) failed (this is described later in the book). Furthermore, scientific evidence points to gender differences at the very level of DNA. Feminist women

⁴⁹ Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

leaders of the 1960s in the U.S. and Europe were raising the slogans of gender equality at a time when modern science was still unequipped to look at the subtler aspects of gender differences. However, modern techniques of genetic examination, DNA discoveries and the emerging science of brain sex has conclusively shown that boys and girls are different from the time the male's sperm penetrates into the female's egg to start the life of the fetus in the womb of the mother. Consequently, after birth, boys and girls grow up differently.

Boys and Girls Brains Develop Differently

Science has shown that long before the birth of the child, the sex hormones released in the womb of his/her mother induce specific, permanent and different developmental effects on the growing brains of the male and female child. For example, during pregnancy in the womb of his mother, the testicles of a developing baby-boy release as much testosterone (male sex hormone) as the amount produced by a young adult. These sex hormones bind to the brain tissue of the fetus and permanently and irreversibly transform his brain. Furthermore, researchers showed in a paper published in the medical journal *Prenatal Diagnosis* (2001 issue), that the brain of an unborn baby girl can be distinguished from a male brain during a regular ultrasound exam of women who are only 26 weeks pregnant.⁵⁰ Similarly, when a group of scientists compared the brain

⁵⁰ Achiron, Reuwen, Lipitz, Shlomo & Achiron, Anat (2001). "Sex-related differences in the development of the human fetal corpus callosum: in utero ultrasonographic study." Prenatal Diagnosis **21**: 116-120.

tissues of infant children, they found significant differences between the brains of boys and the brains of girls. So striking are the differences in the photomicrographs of the brain tissues of male and female children that they are easily visible to the naked human eye. Interestingly, this research which was published in the year 2000 issue of *Developmental Brain Research* was headed by a female research scientist Dr. Maria Cordero.⁵¹

A few decades ago, U.S. psychologist Herbert Landsell from Maryland Research Center found out that men and women were affected quite differently when damage occurred to the same area of the brain. Many studies by later scientists confirmed the findings of Landsell according to which men's brains are more specialized whereas the division of functions in women's brains is not specialized to any one hemisphere.

Men have much better spatial abilities compared to women – i.e. to picture the position, geography and shape of objects in three-dimensional space in their minds' eyes. Superior spatial ability is needed by men to cope with the outside world as the breadwinner of the family. Women, on the other hand, have superior verbal abilities and face reading skills compared to men. This precious skill is much needed by women in nurturing and caring of children as mothers.

⁵¹ Cordero, Maria Elena, Valenzuela, Carlos, Torres, Rafael, Rodriguez, Angel (2000). "Sexual dimorphism in number and proportion of neurons in the human median raphe nucleus." Developmental Brain Research **124**: 43-52.

Boys and Girls Play Differently

Usually, feminist educators argue that the reason boys and girls behave differently is because we raise boys and girls differently. They insist that if we just raise girls to play with trucks and boys to play with dolls, then most of the differences in the behavior of boys and girls will disappear. However, this feminist argument cannot explain why we consistently see differences in the behavior of males and females among animals as well. Laboratory animals do not play with trucks and Barbie dolls; hence, it is hard to use this argument to explain gender differences. The fact of the matter is that male and female brains are different and this difference is even reflected in the games of children.

Child psychologist Capucine La Motte has demonstrated that most children from the age of three prefer to play with children of their own gender. Boy's games are more competitive and often aggressive whereas girl's games are shared and involve conversations. This contention was further supported by the findings of child psychologist Janet Lever who noted that the games played by boys have rules (in 65% of the cases) whereas the games played by girls are more informal, with less rules (only 35% of games have rules).⁵²

If we carefully look at children's games, risk-taking is an important ingredient in boys' games whereas girls' games are characterized by friendship. This pattern continues throughout life. We see consistently that risky sports and activities attract more men than women. Gambling, motor

⁵² Quoted in: Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) "Boys will be boys: Gender Identity Issues." www.masudkhan.co.uk.

racing, boxing, wrestling and bungee-jumping are predominantly male activities. More than twice as many boys as girls die while playing risky and dangerous games and this trend is seen not only all over the world but even in the animal kingdom. For example, anthropologists Linda Marie Fedigan and Sandra Zohar wanted to find the reason why there are so many more adult female Japanese macaque monkeys than male monkeys. Even though at the time of birth the ratio of female to male monkeys is 1:1, by the time they are adults, there are 5 female monkeys for every one surviving male monkey. After investigating the data from 20 years of research, Fedigan and Zohar found out that: "Males are mainly lost to the population because of their risk-taking behaviours." Just like teenage boys, male monkeys engage in risky acts. For instance, Fedigan and Zohar found out that male monkeys try to cross the highway and end up being crushed by an incoming car or truck. Female monkeys do not engage in risk-taking behaviors and tend to avoid the highways.⁵³ Hence, the gender differences appear to be inborn and they are ingrained in both sexes, whether they are humans or animals.

Hormonal Influence on Male and Female Behavior

The foundations of gender behavior are laid down right at the time when the fetus starts its life in the womb of the mother. Studies have shown that sex hormones released by the fetus exert immense influence on its gender behavior. An example is the case of the genetic problem known as

⁵³ Fedigan, Linda Marie and Zohar, Sandra (1997). "Sex Differences in Mortality of Japanese Macaques: Twenty-One Years of Data from the Arashiyama West Population." American Journal of Physical Anthropology **102(2)**: 161-175.

CAH – congenital adrenal hyperplasia. As we know, male and female fetuses start their life in the womb with males having XY chromosomes and females having XX chromosomes. The role of Y chromosome is to release male sex hormones (mainly testosterone), which begin the development of male sexual organs. However, the effects of sex hormones include more than just shaping male and female sexual organs. Their effects penetrate deep into the brain of the fetus. In the case of CAH, there is an abnormal secretion of androgens in an XX fetus, i.e. a child who is genetically female. One in every 20,000 births may be affected by it. Children with this disorder are frequently born with both male and female reproductive organs but the male organs are usually removed by surgery. Although those females appear normal, they display certain typical behavior patterns because of being flooded with high levels of male hormones before birth.⁵⁴ Various scientific papers published on this disease affirm that the CAH females are much more aggressive than normal women, they like to play formal games with rules, they are more comfortable in playing with boys and they are willing to take more risks than girls who have been born without this disorder.

An opposite scenario to CAH girls are the boys who suffer from another genetic abnormality of an additional X chromosome (female chromosome). Although such XXY boys are physically male, their behavior is “typically feminine, lacking competitive and risk-taking impulses, and showing a preference for play with girls in cooperative and

⁵⁴ Kimura, Doreen (1987). "Are Men's and Women's Brains Really Different?" Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne **28**(2): 133-147.

non-aggressive games.”⁵⁵ CAH and XXY studies are used as scientific evidence of the massive influence of hormones on gender behavior.

Furthermore, various studies have shown that girls exposed to male hormones while they were fetuses, can develop a totally male-childhood pattern as a result. Similarly, studies have shown that boys are more aggressive, career-oriented, and curious because of the way they are born, not because of the way they are raised. Their brains were masculinized while they were fetuses in the womb of their mothers. On the other hand, female hormones tend to make women romantic, caring, nurturing, shy, and sensitive.^{56,57} The reason for these gender differences in talent and performance is due to the subtle interplay between the way the brain is formed during fetal life and how the sex hormones act on that brain for the rest of the life.

Different Emotional Processing in Males and Females

People often say “Women are emotional, men are rational”. This statement may be partly true. The reality is that emotionally, there is always a lot more going on inside the

⁵⁵ Quoted in: Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) "Boys will be boys: Gender Identity Issues." www.masudkhan.co.uk.

⁵⁶ Dalton, K. (1976). "Prenatal progesterone and educational attainments." British Journal of Psychiatry **129**: 438-442.

⁵⁷ Ehrhardt, A. A. and Meyer-Bahlburg, H.F.L. (1981). "Effects of prenatal sex hormones on gender-related behaviour." Science **211**: 1312-1314.

female brains compared to male brains. Women feel more and women can express their emotions more compared to men. However, that also means that women can easily be overwhelmed by their emotions. The two genders exhibit great differences in terms of expressing their emotions. A study conducted by a group of scientists from the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Düsseldorf in Germany found that the center of the brain which handles negative emotions remains stuck in the amygdale among the boys even after they grow into manhood. However, in young women, the center of brain activity linked to negative emotions was located in the cerebral cortex.⁵⁸ Various research investigations have been done in this regard and one general finding is that emotions are processed in male brains in very specific areas and either in the left hemisphere of the brain or right hemisphere but not both. On the other hand, emotions are processed in female brains more globally and in both of the brain hemispheres at the same time. For this reason, it is harder for women to separate emotion from reason. However, this emotional nature of women is much needed during the nurturing of and caring for children. A mother's emotional love and care for her children is the most important fact of life responsible for the advancement of the human species on this planet.

Testosterone – Male Hormone for Sex & Aggression

We now know that the male hormone, testosterone, increases aggression, competition, and self-assertion

⁵⁸ Schneider, Frank, et al. (2000). "Gender Differences in Regional Cerebral Activity during Sadness." Human Brain Mapping **9**: 226-238.

whereas the female hormone, estrogen, decreases aggression, competition and self-assertion.⁵⁹ In such a situation, how can we have free mixing of the two sexes in the society? In the case of mixed-gender society, the aggressive and competitive segment of the society will try to oppress the less aggressive and less competitive segment of the society.

Developmental psychologists have discovered that boys appear to be much more hostile to the weak and the disabled. Instead of developing empathy, they become annoyed when they hear cries of pain from a victim. Girls, on the other hand, tend to feel the pain of the victim and they sympathize with the person.⁶⁰ According to one study of British youth, "fighting is part and parcel of male adolescent life."⁶¹ Crime statistics tell us that men are five times more likely than women to commit murder when in extreme anger and they are twenty times more likely to engage in robbery.⁶² The presence of high levels of the

⁵⁹ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

⁶⁰ Moyer, Kenneth Evan "The biological basis for dominance and aggression" in: McGuiness, D. (ed.) (1987). Dominance, Aggression and War. New York, Paragon House. pp. 1-34.

⁶¹ *Young People in the 80s*. quoted in: Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

⁶² Garai, J. E. and Scheinfeld, A. (1968). "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits." Genetic Psychology Monographs **77**: 169-299.

testosterone makes men aggressive. In addition, the presence of the same hormone makes men much more promiscuous than women. As social scientist Alferd Kinsey had put it:

“There seems to be no question but that the human male would be promiscuous in his choice of sexual partners throughout the whole of his life if there were no social restrictions.... The human female is much less interested in a variety of partners.”⁶³

Anne Moir comments on this statement of Kinsey as follows: “Mothers have forever warned their daughters that men are after only one thing, and they are usually right.”⁶⁴

In light of these and other findings, we can see that men are very easily sexually excited due to their nature. Therefore, Islam forbids free mixing of men and women. Aggressiveness and promiscuity among males make it difficult for boys and girls to study and learn together in a coeducation environment as we shall see in the next chapter.

⁶³ Kinsey, Alferd C., Pomeroy, Wardell B. & Martin, Clyde E. (1948). Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male. Philadelphia, W. B. Saunders.

⁶⁴ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

Chapter 4

Boys and Girls Learn Differently – The Case for Single-Sex Education

COEDUCATION IS AN ALIEN IDEA to the Islamic society. The teaching method of the Prophet (peace be upon him) did NOT include coeducation; we learn from his Sunnah (spoken and acted example of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) that he had appointed a separate day for the education of female Companions. Moreover, the teaching method of Ayesha, the mother of the believers, involved teaching male students from behind a curtain. In fact, a cursory look at Islamic history shows that Islamic learning institutions up to the university level were separate for males and females or, at least, there used to be a separation between the two.

If truth be told, coeducation is a by-product of the Western thought and its educational system. This system of education originated in the earlier part of the twentieth century in Scotland and then was taken up by several private and state-aided schools in England. Later, it was also adopted by schools and colleges in the United States of America. In the 1960's, followers of the feminist movement

started to propagate a broad-based idea of coeducation that would allow women to not only work with men side-by-side in the society, but to also sit with them cheek by jowl in schools and colleges. Meanwhile, in the West, the continuous failures that have characterized its experimentation with coeducation over the previous 30 years have prompted some Western intellectuals to seriously consider the option of single-sex education.

Islam is deeply aware of the differences between males and females with respect to psychological development. The Qur'an has clearly stated that males and females are not the same:

﴿وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَىٰ﴾

“And the male is not like the female.”

(Surah Ale-Imran: 36)

The difference noted in the above verse is of wide range. Essentially, it refers to the biological, emotional and psychological differences between the two genders. There is no doubt that men and women have different biological traits that result in a number of differences in their respective developmental and learning patterns throughout their lives. The growth spurt of girls in the adolescent stage has been discovered to be faster than that of boys. Biological processes do really affect and influence psychological tendencies. Due to the inherent biological differences between males and females, variation in their psychological tendencies and dispositions is inevitable.

In this chapter, the negative effects of coeducation and the benefits of single-sex education will be briefly presented in light of religion and modern science.

Psychological Harm of Coeducation

Placing boys and girls in the same class can be disadvantageous and harmful for both, psychologically as well as biologically. The famous Islamic scholar and theologian, Imam Ibn Hazm (died 456 AH), in his book *Tawq al-Hamamah* (The Ring of the Dove), which is about the art, practice and psychology of love and lovers, describes some of the things that take place in mixed gatherings of women and men. He writes:

“I would like to mention to you one thing in clear words that when a man feels that there are *non-mahram* women (with whom it is permissible to get married) present who can listen to him, then he says things or commits actions which are unusual and strange, and he talks about things which are not necessary. Similarly, women commit such actions or say things when they feel that they are in the presence of *non-mahram* men.”⁶⁵

Although they might seem simplistic, Ibn Hazm’s observations and findings are supported and elaborated by modern scientific research.

In his book *Men and Marriage*, George Gilder, notes that boys and girls attain puberty earlier when they are in coeducation environment. The production of male hormone, testosterone, is increased to 20 times than normal in male adolescents and, as a consequence, they suffer from

⁶⁵ *Tawq al-Hamamah* quoted in: Abu Zahra, Muhammad (1989). Life of Imam Ibn Hazm. Lahore, Sheikh Ghulam Ali & Sons.

severe mental and sexual agitation. Similarly, female hormones production increases in adolescent girls and as a consequence, they suffer from lethargy and depression. At puberty, the limbic system (area of the brain) is stimulated by the surge of those sex hormones, which affects the behavior of both sexes. In such conditions, the majority of them keep on thinking about the opposite sex. In the words of George Gilder:

“First and most important, most of the boys and a good number of the girls are thinking about the opposite sex most of the time. If you do not believe this, you are a dreamer.”⁶⁶

In the same vein, Dr. Bruce Cook, Principal of the Southport School on the Gold Coast noted his experience as a principal of a large school: “Boys in single sex schools don’t have the constant presence of girls reminding them of how they look. You know, ‘Am I looking OK for the girls?’”⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that feelings of men and women towards each other stay the same in colleges and universities. In the learning institutions where there is coeducation, love-affairs and courtships are common.

Boys and Girls Learn Differently

Dr. Harriot Hanlan, a female scientist at Virginia Tech University in the U.S.A. analyzed male and female brain activity as part of her research conducted on 284 boys and

⁶⁶ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

⁶⁷ West, Andrew (July 6, 2003) “The boys who will be gentlemen” Sydney Morning Herald

224 girls ranging from age 6 months to 16 years. This study was one of the largest and most carefully conducted of its type. It showed that different regions of the brain develop in a different order in girls compared to boys. Those regions of the brain which develop at different times, rates and order in boys relative to girls include areas involved in language, spatial skills, motor coordination, etc. Dr. Hanlan came to the conclusion that in girls, the brain centers that are related to language abilities are six (6) years more advanced as compared to those centers in boys. On the other hand, the spatial memory of boys is 4 years more advanced as compared to girls.⁶⁸ It is for this reason that boys and girls learn languages, mathematics and geography differently. Similarly, boys develop digital coordination of hands nine months after girls. This is so because the nerves in the boys' fingers develop later as compared to the nerves in girls' fingers. Digital coordination of hands is important in activities such as holding a pencil and good hand-writing. To sum up, what really matters here is that these developmental differences often lead educators, teachers and parents to unfairly sidelining boys as slow or dumb and planting a seed of distaste for school in those boys as early as the first grade. As American philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers notes in her book *The War against Boys*:

“A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, are on the weak side of an educational gender gap. Boys, on average, are a year and a half behind girls in reading

⁶⁸ Hanlon, Harriet, Robert Thatcher and Marvin Cline (1999). "Gender Differences in the Development of EEG Coherence in Normal Children." Developmental Neuropsychology **16(3)**: 479-506.

and writing; they are less committed to school and less likely to go to college.”⁶⁹

Consequently, such boys who are discouraged at an early age during their schooling develop negative feelings toward school which may tarnish their point of view about education and school for the rest of their lives. Professor Deborah Stipek, now dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, and her colleague Tricia Valeski, have shown in their research that boys who fail to do well in kindergarten develop “negative perceptions of competence,” and those negative attitudes are “difficult to reverse as [they] progress through school.”⁷⁰

The gulf of learning differences between boys and girls increases with time – more evidently so in the coeducation environment. Under such circumstances, one wonders how could the two sexes be placed in the same classroom for learning?

Boys and Girls Hear Differently

In research studies carried out over the past 40 years, scientists have shown that right from childhood, the female sense of hearing is about four times better than the hearing ability in males. This finding has been affirmed in research conducted by two scientists, Jane Cassidy and Karen Ditty, and published in the *Journal of Music Therapy* in 2001.

⁶⁹ Sommers, Christina Hoff (2000). The War against Boys. New York, Simon & Schuster.

⁷⁰ Valeski, Tricia & Deborah, Stipek (2001). "Young Children's Feelings about School." Child Development **72(4)**: 1198-1213. Quoted in: Why Gender Matters by: Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D.

When these two female scientists conducted a study on 350 newborns, they found that young girls have better hearing ability than boys of the same age.⁷¹ This difference in the male and female hearing capacities has deep implications during their education. For example, in a mixed-gender classroom, if the teacher speaks in a gentle and low voice, boys will engage in acts of naughtiness because they cannot hear the teacher. Conversely, if the teacher speaks with a loud voice so that the boys can hear him, the girls (whose sense of hearing is already four times stronger than boys) sitting in the front rows will feel as if the teacher is drilling in their ears.

Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., founder and director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, author of *“Why Gender Matters”*, and a family doctor and psychologist, argues that due to the hard-wired differences between boys and girls, it can become impossible for both genders to learn successfully in the classroom together. In one interview, Dr. Sax noted that in co-ed classes almost every considerable choice we make will benefit one gender and disadvantage the other. He further added that since girls hear better than boys, one of the reasons for boys’ falling behind is simply that they can’t hear the teacher in the classroom.⁷² Furthermore, in a recent review paper on various research studies on sex differences in hearing and their practical implications for teaching in the classroom, Dr. Sax notes that **“the average boy may need**

⁷¹ Cassidy, Jane & Ditty, Karen (2001). "Gender differences among newborns on a transient otoacoustic emissions test for hearing." *Journal of Music Therapy* **38**: 28-35.

⁷² Horsey, Jen. "Boys continue to struggle with reading and writing". Toronto (CP) Quoted in: (www.singlesexschools.org)

the teacher to speak more loudly – roughly 6 to 8 decibels more loudly – **if the average boy is to hear the teacher as well as the average girl hears.”**⁷³ Needless to say, such problems do not exist in single-sex classrooms.

Boys and Girls Brains Respond to Stress Differently

Recently, researcher Tracey Shores of Rutgers University (USA) and her associates conducted a study on male and female brains. After the study, they concluded that the nature of the male brain is such that its learning ability increases when it is under stress, whereas the learning ability of the female brain is impaired and reduced when it is exposed to stress (PNAS, Oct. 15, 2002)⁷⁴ Interestingly, in another study, Dr. Shores and her colleagues at Rutgers, Princeton, and Rockefeller University showed that laboratory animals also exhibit sex differences in learning while they are under stressful situations. Their research showed that stress improves learning capacity in male animals whereas stress inhibits learning in female animals.⁷⁵

⁷³ Sax, Leonard (2010). "Sex Differences in Hearing: Implications for best practice in the classroom." Advances in Gender and Education **2**: 13-21.

⁷⁴ Shores, Tracey J. & Miesegaes, George (Oct. 15, 2002). "Testosterone *in utero* and at birth dictates how stressful experience will affect learning in adulthood." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences **99**: 13955-13960.

⁷⁵ Wood, Gwendolyn & Shores, Tracey J. (1998). "Stress facilitates Classical Conditioning in Males, but Impairs Classical Condition in Females through Activational Effects of Ovarian

These findings suggest that boys need discipline and a separate-sex environment for their abilities to be sharpened. Conversely, girls require a lenient environment for studying. This is also due to the fact that girls, whether children or grown ups, are adept at face-reading. In a research published in the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* (vol. 154), a group of researchers at Wellesley College did a study on young children and found that 3½-year old girls have the ability to interpret facial expressions better than 5-year old boys. Obviously, this result indicates that girls can judge the signs of anger and irritation on the teacher's face. Boys, on the other hand, are very poor in this ability and, therefore, need admonishment.⁷⁶

Long Range Poisonous Effects of Coeducation

On May 26, 2003, *Business Week* printed a powerful article under the title, "The New Gender Gap" written by journalist Michelle Collins. In it, Collins notes the fact that there has been a continuous decline in the education of men in the past 20 years. In Western countries, a wide section of boys do not make it to college after finishing their high schools. The reason, she explains, lies in the fact that coeducation provides an unnatural and often feminine educational environment, and, as a result, many boys become

Hormones." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences **95**: 4066-4071.

⁷⁶ Boyatzis, Chris, Chazan, E. & Ting, C.Z. (1993). "Preschool children's decoding of facial emotions." Journal of Genetic Psychology **154**: 375-382.

disappointed and lose their focus on education. Some even react in negative ways as they try to show their manhood by committing crimes and resorting to violence. Furthermore, since 1970, as the number of coeducation schools increased in the U.S.A., suicide rates amongst young boys rose by three folds.⁷⁷

To add insult to injury, when teachers in the coeducational environment observe that boys (in comparison to girls) usually have hard time sitting in one place to learn, they commonly identify them as having the disease known as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and some of these children end up taking drugs such as "Ritalin". In reality, about 80% of the Ritalin used in the whole world is given to children "diagnosed" with ADD in the U.S.A. Of course this is what the reality is, but lest we forget, this is also happening while the U.S.A. is leading the world in the area of coeducation. What is more important is that Ritalin use has increased 500% over the past decade, leading some to call it the new K-12 management tool. According to Paul R. Wolpe, a psychiatry professor at the University of Pennsylvania, there are school districts where 20% to 25% of the boys are on that drug. Wolpe notes, "Ritalin is a response to an artificial social context that we've created for children."⁷⁸ In my opinion, the children are not the ones who are sick, rather, it is the mixed-gender educational system that is sick and needs treatment. What most of us are

⁷⁷ Conlin, Michelle (March 26, 2003). The New Gender Gap: From kindergarten to grad school, boys are becoming the second sex. (Cover story) [BusinessWeek](#) online.

⁷⁸ Conlin, Michelle (March 26, 2003). The New Gender Gap: From kindergarten to grad school, boys are becoming the second sex. (Cover story) [BusinessWeek](#) online.

not aware of is the appalling situation of children with even worse psychological and emotional conditions in many third world countries that follow coeducational systems.

Because coeducational environments create similar cases of depression and lack of focus in these children, they show similar behavior to that of the children in American schools, but instead of getting Ritalin, they end up getting harsh physical punishment. The teachers assume that these children just do not like to learn or to respect the school's discipline, so they punish them with increasing harshness to enforce discipline and change their behavior.

A further question remains: when this system of education is forced upon children for their lifelong schooling, what is the extent of this harm, and at what expense? Especially for parents and educators, before giving any answers, there is much for them to be made aware of, to learn and to reflect upon.

There are many limitations of coed schools. By their very nature, coed schools shortchange both boys and girls because, as we have shown in this chapter as well as the previous chapter, both boys and girls learn differently. The different brain regions of boys and girls develop in different times and sequences. It is not possible to develop a school which would satisfy the needs of one sex without putting the other sex at disadvantage. As Andrew Hunter, an ex-teacher who had the opportunity to teach at coed schools as well as at single-sex schools puts it: "teaching in a coed classroom is like teaching two classes at once."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Buie, Elizabeth (Nov 21, 2000). "Today's Sexual Evolution". *Glasgow Herald*. pg. 16, Glasgow. Quoted in: Why Gender Matters by: Leonard Sax.

Table: Boys & Girls Learn Differently - A Comparison

Types of Differences	Girls	Boys
Learning Environment	Girls benefit from a lenient and supportive environment for studying.	Boys thrive with structure, discipline, and separate-sex settings.
Emotional Perception	Girls as young as 3½ years can accurately interpret facial expressions of anger or irritation on a person's face.	Boys struggle with interpreting facial expressions, even at age 5, requiring clear guidance.
Cognitive Development	Girls' language abilities are about 6 years ahead of boys at the same age.	Boys' spatial memory is about 4 years more advanced than that of girls of the same age.
Hearing Sensitivity	Girls have four times better hearing and prefer gentle, soft tones from teachers.	Boys have reduced hearing sensitivity and respond better to louder instructions.
Classroom Behavior	Girls can sit calmly and focus in class without much supervision.	Boys, due to their energy and impulsivity, often struggle to sit still and focus.

Sexual Harassment suffered by Girls in Co-ed Schools

In the year 1993, a survey was conducted on school-age girls by *Seventeen* magazine. In the survey, more than 4,200 school-age girls reported that “they have been pinched, fondled or subjected to sexually suggestive remarks at school, most of them ... both frequently and publicly.” Researchers from Wellesley College, Massachusetts followed up on the magazine’s survey and their findings confirmed the findings reported in *Seventeen* magazine. Wellesley College researchers found that “nearly two-fifths [about 40 %] of the girls reported being sexually harassed daily and another 29 percent said they were harassed weekly. More than two-thirds said the harassment occurred in view of other people. Almost 90 percent were the target

of unwanted sexual comments or gestures.”⁸⁰

A natural consequence of such sexual harassment faced by girls in co-education schools is their diminished interest in going to school altogether. After hearing many accounts of harassment from her adolescent-girl clients, Mary Pipher notes that she is seeing an increasing number of girls who are “school refusers”, girls who “tell me they simply cannot face what happens to them at school.”⁸¹

High Rates of Teenage Pregnancies in Coed Schools

Putting boys and girls who reached the age of adolescence with the surge of sex hormones together is definitely not a morally healthy idea. Dr. Sax notes that at every girls’ school he has ever visited, the teachers, administrators, counselors, and especially the students have all agreed on one thing: that the rate of unwanted teenage pregnancy is much lower at their all-girls school than it is at any nearby coed school. To elaborate his point, Dr. Sax gives the example of the James Lynch High School in Montreal. This school used to be a coed school but five years previously, its principal Wayne Commerford converted the school into a single-sex institution. Girls were assigned to girls-only classes while boys were placed in boys-only classes. As a result of this change, absenteeism dropped by two-thirds and scores on standardized tests improved by a large margin

⁸⁰ Sege, Irene (March 24, 1993). “A U.S. Survey Shows Wide Harassment of Girls in School”. Boston Globe. Boston.

⁸¹ Pipher, Mary (1994). Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls. New York, Ballantine Books.

in those single-gender classes. In addition to such benefits, there is another surprising fact which Mr. Commerford told Dr. Sax, that the rate of teenage pregnancy decreased dramatically after the change to the single-gender classes – from about fifteen girls per year before the change to about two girls per year after the change.⁸²

What is the reason that teenage pregnancy is less likely when girls attend girls-only schools? Apart from the obvious reasons, there are deep psychological and social reasons. At a coed school, if a girl says no to sex with her boyfriend, this not only jeopardizes her relationship with her boyfriend, it also endangers her social identity at school.⁸³

On the other hand, in single-sex schools, girls do not have the same kind of peer-pressure that they must find a boyfriend, at least not during school hours. They have more control over their sexual-decision making. It is easier for them to imagine life without a boyfriend. Hence, girls in single-sex schools are less likely to be involved in premarital sex and, consequently, become pregnant.

⁸² Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

⁸³ Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

Can Girls Seek Higher Education from Male Teachers?

If there is adequate separation between the male teacher and the female student then the answer to this question, from an Islamic viewpoint, is “yes”. For example, if there is an all-girls class taught by a male teacher but all the girls are wearing a face-veil or when using a veil or curtain so that the teacher cannot see the faces of the girls or using video teleconferencing as the ones used in the Saudi Arabian educational system. There is enough scientific evidence which establishes beyond the shadow of any doubt that there lies a great ‘*fitnah*’ (temptation) when female students learn from male professors in a coed environment.

Social scientists have shown that a person’s physical attractiveness, especially female facial attractiveness, plays an important role in human interactions within society.⁸⁴ A study published in the journal *Sociometry* by Jerome E. Singer of Pennsylvania State University has shown that even college professors are swayed by a female student’s beautiful face. In explaining the results of his study, Singer asserts that teachers give “the benefit of doubt in grades” to attractive girls and many of the teachers acknowledge that “they can recall the names of the pretty girls in their classes.”⁸⁵ This may not apply to every single male

⁸⁴ Adams, Gerald R. (1977). "Physical Attractiveness Research: Toward a Developmental Social Psychology of Beauty." Human Development **20**: 217-239.

⁸⁵ Singer, Jerome E. (Jun 1964). "The Use of Manipulative Strategies: Machiavellianism and Attractiveness." Sociometry **27**(2): 128-150.

professor teaching female students but this research does tell us that there lies a big ‘fitnah’ (temptation) in the situations where girls are taught by male teachers in the absence of a veil.

Because of their sociable nature, girls like to establish friendship with their teachers. There is a major difference between the natures of boys and girls in this regard. Anne Moir points out that girls, due to their superior verbal abilities, are more interested in people and in establishing relationships with the teacher whereas boys due to their superiority in spatial skills are less interested in people and more inclined to explore the world around them.⁸⁶

Leonard Sax maintains that most of the time girls assume that the teacher is like a friend to them, but boys think otherwise. So, in the event of encountering difficulties, girls will frequently consult the teacher. Sax states:

“Girls are much more likely than boys to ask a teacher for advice about personal matters, totally unrelated to the academic material.”⁸⁷

In view of this tendency, how can it be safe for a young girl to study with a male teacher and also discuss her personal matters with a person who is not her “*mahram*” (close male relative)? It is well known that proximity is the most important predictor of love. Yes, there may be exceptions

⁸⁶ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

⁸⁷ Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

when a female student and a male teacher maintain a perfectly platonic relationship without letting any indecent thought cross their minds. But the rulings of Islam are not for exceptions. The Islamic approach to dealing with vice and corruption in the society is to nip the evil in the bud. This can be better understood by learning about the well known principle of Islamic law called: *sadd baab ath-Tharai'* (i.e., blocking or narrowing the means/ways that lead to commission of sins). According to this principle, if an act or event is likely to lead you to sin, you should avoid it, even if it is not a sin in itself. It is due to this principle that Islam always discourages the free-mixing of the sexes, which includes coeducation as well as young girls studying in close proximity to male teachers. Imam Ibn Qayyim writes in his *I'laam ul Muwaqqi'een 'an Rabbil 'Aalameen* about this Islamic principle thus:

"The Islamic principle known as *sadd baab ath-tharai'*, means that some of the permissible acts (*mubahat*) are sometimes forbidden lest they serve as back doors for commission of prohibited acts. For instance, exchanging gifts among Muslims is a recommended Sunnah act, but it is forbidden to present gifts to a government official for fear that it might lead to bribery and corruption. Also, to ogle the face of a woman (who is not one's *mahram*) is prohibited because such intense staring is capable of sowing the germs of fornication in the heart." ⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Ibn Al-Qayyim, al-Jawziyyah (1976). Aa'lamul Moqi'een. Lahore, Ahl Hadeeth Academy. Vol. 2

The Success of Single-Sex Education: Practical Evidence

After experiencing the deleterious effects of coeducation, many countries in the West have recently started experimenting with the single-sex education system. An overwhelming majority of the people affected by this change indicated that seeing and experiencing the changes brought by applying single-sex education system in their schools helped them truly appreciate the idea and understand it better. Benjamin Wright, principal of the Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Seattle, Washington, turned his previously co-ed school into one with separate-sex classrooms. Mr. Wright stated that previously in coeducation, most of the teachers' time was wasted in resolving issues arising from boys teasing the girls and vice versa. However, now in the separate-sex environment, they are actually teaching knowledge to the children. Mr. Wright also noted that in the state-level exams which were held in Washington in 2002 (The Washington Assessment of Student Learning), their school boys who were previously being taught under the coeducation system and were scoring 10%, increased their scores to 73%, courtesy of single-sex education, an outstanding success indeed.

Testimonials from Around the World

Single-sex schools have started to become quite popular in many Western countries including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Jamaica and Ireland. Here a few examples of those countries will be given in addition to one example from a Muslim country (Saudi Arabia) where

education is successfully conducted in a single-sex-classroom-based system.

United States of America

In 2001, U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in alliance with the former first lady Hillary Clinton drafted new legislation legalizing single-sex education in American public schools. The U.S. Senate passed their statute by a unanimous vote and made it a law. Since then, the numbers of schools offering single-sex education in the U.S. has increased five-fold. For example, the number of American schools offering single-sex educations was 27 in the fall of 2001. By the fall of 2004, their number jumped to 140 single-sex schools.⁸⁹

Even in US public schools, several schools' districts have considered and are currently considering expanding single gender schools, especially in high schools. For example, in 2006, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools District opened two single gender schools: The Young Women's Preparatory Academy and The Young Men's Preparatory Academy. The two magnet schools, which enroll students from all over the county, boasted above-average test scores and attendance rates, and have placed students on track to attend top-tier colleges such as Wellesley, North Carolina and Duke. Studies show that girls and boys are hard-wired differently — and their brains develop at different rates. "There is evidence that language skills develop faster in girls," said University of Miami child psychologist Monica Dowling. She further added: "Also, we know that boys need

⁸⁹ Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

to move around more. They don't like to sit down and talk about feelings." Hence, gender –separate schools are empowering for girls as well as for boys.⁹⁰

Jamaica

Single-sex education is quite common in Jamaica. In a large study of Jamaican schools published in the 1985 issue of the *International Journal of Science Education*, it was shown that girls at single-sex high schools performed much better in mathematics and science as compared to those girls who were studying at co-ed high schools in Jamaica. The study concluded that “the effects of sex stereotyping are more sharply apparent in the coeducational setting, for here there appears to be a stronger need to differentiate between the sexes. Thus, even if subjects such as mathematics and sciences are technically available to girls in this type of school [mixed gender school], they are more likely than their single-sex institutional counterparts to get the message that such subjects are unfeminine and beyond their grasp intellectually.”⁹¹ Another very interesting study which confirms this contention is conducted in Britain by Lawrie and Brown who surveyed 284 students of the age group 14-15. The study findings, which were published in the 1992 issue of the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, arrived at similar results as the above-mentioned research. Lawrie and Brown found that students at all-girls' schools reported enjoying math more, and found math less difficult, as compared to the girls who attended co-ed schools. Girls

⁹⁰ Tampa Bay Online, Published December 20, 2010.

⁹¹ Hamilton, Harriet (1985). "Performance levels in science and other subjects for Jamaican adolescents attending single-sex and Coeducational high schools." *International Journal of Science Education* **69**(4): 535-547.

at the all-girls schools were more than twice as likely to say that they planned to take advanced math, compared to girls at co-ed schools.⁹²

Canada

Another example of the success of single-sex education comes from the inner-city James Lyng High School in Montreal, Canada that was a coeducational institution in the past. Five years ago, single-sex classrooms were introduced in the school and since then, students' absenteeism has declined, pass scores are higher and the number of students going on from this school to college has nearly doubled. All this is due to the blessings of single-sex education.⁹³

Our next testimony from Canada is taken from a report published by the *Montreal Gazette*, in its October 1999 issue titled: "Let's Separate Boys, Girls in Classes". This article reports on research conducted by the Superior Educational Council of Quebec and its final recommendation to the Canadian government advising it to end coeducation in its public schools and have them adopt the old system of the 1940s when schools separated males from females and even had separate entrances for boys and girls to the school buildings. The head of this educational council, Celine Saint-Pierre, was quoted as saying: "There

⁹² Lawrie, L. & Brown, R. (1992). "Sex stereotypes, school subject preferences and career aspirations as a function of single/mixed-sex schooling and preference/absence of an opposite sex sibling." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* **62**: 132-138.

⁹³ Horsey, Jen "Boys continue to struggle with reading and writing". (Toronto (CP) Quoted in: (www.singlesexschools.org)

is plenty of evidence that boys and girls learn differently."⁹⁴ She further added that education should be separate-gender based, otherwise boys and girls will keep on getting weaker in their studying and Quebec society will have to suffer its bitter consequences in the future. In addition, the article reported the council as being very concerned about the state of education in the province; quoting their statement that, "Quebec is headed for a social crisis, a situation where males won't be able to get jobs in a knowledge-based economy."⁹⁵

Australia

In July 2003 a conference of educational experts was held in Sydney, Australia, where several speakers presented evidence that the boys who are educated in single-sex schools seem to do better in terms of maturity and social adjustment than boys who attend coeducation schools. Dr. Bruce Cook, principal of the Southport School on the Gold Coast, told the audience of his experiences and observations that boys educated in single-sex schools prove to be better husbands in the future because, due to absence of girls around them in schools and colleges, they do not have to adopt a 'masculine' attitude as he noted: "In co-ed, boys tend to adopt a quasi-masculine attitude because girls are there. They feel they have to demonstrate their emerging masculinity by gross macho over-reaction." Hence, boys in single-sex schools "become more sensitive men."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Zacharias, Yvonne (Oct. 14, 1999). "Let's separate boys, girls in classes: report". The Montreal Gazette. (www.montrealgazette.com/news)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ West, Andrew (July 6, 2003) "The boys who will be gentlemen" Sydney Morning Herald

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is one of the few Muslim countries where separate-sex educational system has remained intact even after the flood of European imperialism into Muslim lands in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Saudi Arabia, the separate-sex educational system is implemented in accordance with Islamic laws and injunctions and it is done in such an excellent way that it may serve as a model for other Westernized Muslim countries which have not yet realized the scientific and moral importance of single-sex education.

A salient feature of the educational system of Saudi Arabia is the segregation of the sexes. One of the ways this is achieved is through the use of videoconferencing. This relieves girls and women of travelling long distances and allow them to seek education in the comfort of their homes or in an all-girls' classroom with other female students. This method of videoconferencing initially originated due to the shortage of female professors. However, it became so successful that now it is widely practiced in the educational system in Saudi Arabia. This method allows instruction without the teacher and the students ever meeting face-to-face.⁹⁷ Abdussalam Nakshabandi, in his detailed article about videoconferencing in King Saud University (Saudi Arabia) states: "This phenomenon came into existence in the Saudi higher education system solely because it

⁹⁷ Mackey, Sandra (2002). The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom. New York, W.W. Norton & Company. *Quoted in:* Baki, Roula (June 17, 2004) Education Policy Analysis Archives 12(28)

accommodates the reception by female students of televised lectures conducted by male instructors...[through the] live transmission of video and audio signals from specially equipped classes attended by male students to female classes.”⁹⁸

The way videoconference is structured in Saudi Arabia’s single-sex educational system is described as follows: In each of the classrooms attended by the male professor and his male students, there is a fixed remote-controlled video camera and a receive-only telephone line, along with a microphone that is “linked by cable to studio sound-input.”⁹⁹ With such a setup, only the professor hears his female students and he is only able to contact them by being videotaped. On the other side, at the girls’ facility, the classroom contains several tables, each seating three or four girls. There is a color monitor on each table and a one-way telephone line that may be used to contact the professor by lifting the receiver. Such a setup guarantees that only the girls can see the professor and start a conversation with him. Moreover, the girls can hear each others’ questions, but in the male classroom, only the professor is able to hear their questions. If the professor would like to, he may convey the posed question to his male students. The girls’ classrooms

⁹⁸ Nakshabandi, Abdussalam A. (1993). "Videoconferencing; King Saud University (Saudi Arabia)." International Journal of Instructional Media **20**(2): 127-136.

⁹⁹ Nakshabandi, Abdussalam A. (1993). "Videoconferencing; King Saud University (Saudi Arabia)." International Journal of Instructional Media **20**(2): 127-136.

are supervised by a female teacher's aid who tracks attendance and order, and oversees the exams.¹⁰⁰

This method of videoconferencing has several advantages over mixed-gender classrooms. The advantages include elimination of the possibility of sexual harassment of female students by male teachers, providing the opportunity for female students to ask their male instructor a question over the phone which the former may be too shy to ask in face-to-face teaching and less distraction for both male and female students which is common in mixed-sex classrooms due to the presence of the opposite sex. Obviously, this method of videoconferencing is devised for the cases when the teacher is male whereas the student body is female; otherwise, in all-girls colleges, the girls do have the opportunity in Saudi Arabia to study face-to-face with female professors in a single-sex classroom setting.

As of 1997, there were seven universities with 68 colleges and another 61 women-only colleges in Saudi Arabia. Based on the Saudi Arabian information resource website, in 1998, the King Khaled bin Abdul Aziz University was founded which brought the total to 8 universities.¹⁰¹ If we look at the graduation rate, the number of males graduating annually from universities rose from 795 in 1970 to 21,229 in 1999, while the number of female graduates rose from 13

¹⁰⁰ Nakshabandi, Abdussalam A. (1993). "Videoconferencing; King Saud University (Saudi Arabia)." International Journal of Instructional Media **20**(2): 127-136.

¹⁰¹ Baki, Roula (June 17, 2004). "Gender-segregated Education in Saudi Arabia: Its Impact on Social Norms and the Saudi Labor Market." Education Policy Analysis Archives **12**(28).

to 21,721 – ending in a total that slightly exceeded the number of male graduates.¹⁰²

Personal Testimonials

We conclude this discussion of the development and growth of the single-sex educational systems by the following personal testimonials of the benefits of single-sex education.

The first anecdote comes from the personal experience of historian Steven Miles. Dr. Miles put in plain words, in an interview, how attending a single-sex high school was the main reason his abilities flourished and, eventually, he did his PhD in history. He said:

"I began high school more shy than most adolescents. But I did take the enormous step of joining the speech team, and that opened a new world to me. It led me to other activities...I strongly believe that they made possible the development of interests and skills that led me to undertake a PhD in history. When I think back on the catalyst-joining the speech team-and I consider the fact that forensics in Illinois is dominated by girls, about 70/30, I cannot imagine that I would have joined the team in a co-ed school...I needed the chance to explore my own potential without worrying about looking foolish in front of the girls."¹⁰³

¹⁰² Cordesman, Anthony H. (2003). Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century. Connecticut, Praeger. *Quoted in:* Baki, Roula (June 17, 2004) Education Policy Analysis Archives 12(28)

¹⁰³ Single-Sex Education. (www.singlesexschools.org)

In a recent *Newsweek* article (October 24, 2005) titled, "With No Boys to Ogle, We Had Time To Learn," Christine Flowers wrote of her experiences as an undergraduate student at Bryn Mawr College (which follows separate-sex education at undergraduate level). She was exceedingly happy to get admission at Bryn Mawr, especially because it gave her the opportunity to extend her 12 years of single-sex education into 16. To Flowers, it is quite distracting to have a member of the opposite sex sitting in class right next to you. Flowers described her female college mates at Bryn Mawr, as talented, confident, independent, and focused.¹⁰⁴ Studying at a separate-gender educational institution encouraged Christine Flowers to concentrate on her studies as she points out: "I immersed myself in French and Italian, history and philosophy, fencing and swimming. I never once worried about whether I was going to have a date on Friday night (I never once did), nor did I hesitate to contribute a comment in class because I felt intimidated by the attractive young man to my left...Bryn Mawr [college] helped me to understand that excellence has no gender preference."¹⁰⁵ Flowers further clarifies that females are not the only ones who benefit from single-sex education. Educating the two genders in separate classes is beneficial for boys as well, and Christine Flowers' experience as a school teacher stands testimony to this fact as she writes:

¹⁰⁴ Flowers, Christine (October 24, 2005). "With No Boys to Ogle, We Had Time to Learn". Newsweek.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

“I used to teach at a boys' school in suburban Philadelphia, and while I'm certain that my teenage scholars weren't completely unaware of female charms, they did seem to focus admirably on their schoolwork between the hours of 8 and 3...The ability to spend a few hours concentrating on developing their minds and not their social skills should take precedence over some misguided urge to integrate.”¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Evidence based on scientific research and empirical studies has been briefly presented and discussed in this chapter to support the claim that single-sex educational systems are best suited to the human '*fitrah*' (inherent Islamic nature) and the function of education in human life. The chapter also pointed out the negative effects of coeducation and the fact that it is an unnatural social construct with more harm than benefit. Boys and girls need separate training to suit their different rates of physical, intellectual and emotional growth. Single-sex schools provide a better environment for young people where they remain free from the pull of the opposite sex. This difference in the psychological make-up results in a huge difference in the way the two sexes learn in a class and in the way members of the two genders influence the learning of one another while present in the same classroom. Islam cares much for the preservation of morals, modesty and chastity in a Muslim society. To achieve this goal, Islam requires the highest degree of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

cautiousness when dealing with the members of the opposite sex. A Muslim is always asked to distance himself from any thing that stirs his sexual urge, outside the bounds of marriage. Islam forbids free intermingling of sexes in the society. Islam has the basic requirement of young men and women maintaining the purity of their sexual lives from the very beginning. Muslim adolescents are specifically asked to maintain a safe distance from the opposite sex for their own benefit. Islam is a religion that is in complete accordance with human nature. Islam emphasizes the upbringing of children in an environment that would preserve their 'fitrah' (inherent Islamic nature) state. If children or youth attend mixed-gender classes in education, there are good chances they will be exposed to acts that may tarnish their whole worldview of sexual morality. They may even lose the ability to distinguish between modesty and indecency, morality and immorality, chastity and promiscuity.

In coeducational environments, students have more opportunities and temptations to go astray. They cannot maintain the right etiquette of intermingling as prescribed by the Islamic Shari'ah, at all times during school hours. Also, students in coeducation schools might become more consumed by how they appear or present themselves to the opposite sex than by their studies. Perhaps this is what many sociologists refer to on the subject of friendship between man and woman: that it is difficult to have pure friendship between the two, because the more the friendship deepens, the more the instincts find their way to physical expression between the man and the woman.

Chapter 5

Motherhood & the Home front – Religious & Scientific Perspective

“All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock. An Imam is a shepherd and he is responsible for those in his care. A man is a shepherd in his family and is responsible for those in his care. The woman is a shepherd in her husband's house and is responsible for those in her care. The servant is a shepherd of his master's property and is responsible for what is in his care.”

(Saheeh Bukhari)¹⁰⁷

Islam has placed the responsibility of social life in the hands of men and the responsibility of future life in the hands of women. Nature has divided the upbringing of future generations into four stages: pregnancy, delivery, breast-feeding and education. Each of those four periods is so critical to the overall development of a child that any negligence at any of those stages could be destructive for the child.

Islam recognizes that motherhood is a career in itself. In practical life, as will be shown in this chapter, it has been

¹⁰⁷ Saheeh Bukhari – Kitab al-At'aq (Book of Setting Free the Slaves), Chapter: A slave is the shepherd of his master's property.

observed that most women find home and family as the most fulfilling and rewarding experience. Nature has assigned different duties to men and women. Nature is not sexist. By bestowing the ability to bear children, nature has clearly told us what the sphere of activity for women is. Furthermore, by not shouldering fathers with the responsibilities of motherhood, nature has informed us as to what the duties of men are. To perform their respective duties, men and women have been given different bodies, different potentials, different attributes and different psychologies.

In Western society, when a woman was not given respect as a mother, homemaker, and housewife, she had to come out of her home in search of prestige and respect and started to perform the duties of males. She had to act like a male in order to get respect from society. Islam, on the other hand, gave respect to women while keeping her a woman and while she was performing female tasks. In truth, Islam gave women status equivalent to men or even a little more as a mother compared to a father.

No matter how “equally” the modernists distribute the functions of child-rearing, men know very well that the woman’s role with her children is far more important than a father’s role. There is no way that men can share the sense of fulfillment which a mother gets when she nurses her child. There is no way that men can share the “mothering hormone” (prolactin) which women secrete during pregnancy, childbirth and nursing.

Mother – The Foundation of a Family

A Muslim woman may pursue a career, but greater value is given to her role as wife and mother. Islam especially elevates the status of a mother due to her sacrifices during pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing. For instance, the Qur'an says:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ
كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا﴾

"We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents; in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth." (Surah al-Ahqaaf:15)

Similarly, in one prophetic tradition, it has been noted:

"A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?' The Prophet said: 'Your mother.' The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: 'Then your mother.' The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: 'Then your mother.' The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: 'Then your father.'" (Bukhari)¹⁰⁸

When mothers left the home to pursue a "career life" in the industry or in the office, society lost its home-makers. Child rearing became a burden. Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, in his 1987 book *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, has shed some light on the results of their "sincere and justified desire to make women equal with men in everything." He writes: "women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties

¹⁰⁸ Saheeh Bukhari – *Kitab al-Adab* (The Book of Good Manners and Form)

at home – housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a family atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems – in children’s and in young people’s behavior, in our morals, culture and in production – are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitude to family responsibilities.”¹⁰⁹ Then, Gorbachev poses the question: “What should we do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission?”¹¹⁰

Islam provided the answer to the question posed by President Gorbachev as well as the problem faced by much of Western society today. Islam elevated the status of women but assigned different spheres of duties for men and women. For women, the most important task is to nurture and take care of their family as mentioned in the hadeeth of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

عليكن بالبيت فانه جهادكن

(مسند احمد)

“Take care of your home for that is your *Jihaad*.” (Musnad Ahmed)¹¹¹ Jihaad is the highest act of Islamic worship. To regard home-making as Jihaad for women is to give it the highest possible ranking in the Islamic acts of worship.

There is no substitute for a mother at home. It is the mother

¹⁰⁹ Gorbachev, Mikhail (1988). Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World. New York, Harper & Row

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibn Hanbal, Ahmed (1995) al-Musnad. Ed. by Shakir, Ahmed & Razin, Hamza. Cairo: Daarul Hadeeth, no. 23837. The chain of narration of this hadeeth is graded as acceptable (*hasan*) and all the narrators of this hadeeth are reliable. Furthermore, all the narrators of this hadeeth chain are the ones from whom Imam Bukhari narrated except Mu’awiya bin Ishaaq at-Taimi and Shuraik bin Abdullah al-Qadhi. (<http://www.islamweb.net/hadith>)

who binds the family. She is the best person to read the face of her child and understand the child's needs or turmoils in life. Any grown up man or woman is none other than what his mother shaped him to be in childhood. Women by their very nature are nurturing. Feminist writer Carol Gilligan notes in her book *In a Different Voice* that "women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care."¹¹² Sociologists and anthropologists will tell us that everywhere in the pre-modern world, women were primarily involved in caring for the young.

Even though Allah has assigned very high status to both parents - father and mother, He has elevated the status of mother to the pinnacle of all human relationships. The womb of the mother is the connecting point between our journeys from non-existence to the eternal existence. Matching His two supreme attributes *ar-Rahman* [the All-Merciful] and *ar-Rahim* [the Most Merciful], Allah has given the name *rahm* to the womb of the mother, as mentioned in the hadeeth. Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "Ties of kinship (*rahm*) is derived from the All-Merciful (*ar-Rahman*). (Al-Adab al-Mufrad)¹¹³ Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) informed us that *rahma* (mercy, or loving compassion) is an attribute derived from the word *rahim*, meaning a womb. Similarly, in another hadeeth the high and noble status of mother is mentioned as follows:

"On the day that He created the heavens and the

¹¹² Gilligan, Carol (1993). *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press.

¹¹³ Bukhari, Imam Abu Abdullah Mohammad bin Ismael (1983). *Al-Adab al-Mufrad al-Bukhari*. Karachi, Nafees Academy.

earth, Allah created a hundred rahmas (mercies), each of which is as great as the space which lies between heaven and earth. And He sent one rahma down to earth, by which a mother has rahma for her child.”

(Saheeh Muslim – Chapter on Repentance)

For this reason, Western anthropologists working in Islamic countries and societies constantly report a kind of dual hierarchy which requires wives to be dutiful to their husbands, while husbands must be dutiful to their mothers.¹¹⁴ These are the fruits of the Islamic teachings regarding the status of parents. Even in the most Westernized Muslim countries, sons consider it an act of shame and disgrace to send their aging mothers to a nursing home. The pivotal position of a Muslim mother for her family has been nicely summed up by Khalid Baig as follows:

“In a way their role is like that of the archer's in the battle of Uhud. It looked less important, but was the key to the fate of the entire army. If women hold on to their front, the entire army will succeed. If they leave it for "greater action" elsewhere, everyone will lose.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Quoted in: Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) (April 1999). “Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender”. (www.masudkhan.co.uk)

¹¹⁵ Baig, Khalid. “Motherhood”
<http://www.albalagh.net/women/Motherhood.shtml>

Biological Basis of Our Connection to Our Mothers

In the Qur'an, Allah says:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ
وَفَصَّلَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ أَشْكُرَ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ
الْمَصِيرُ﴾

“And We have enjoined on mankind (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship (during pregnancy) and stopping of his breastfeeding is in two years – Give thanks to Me and your parents – Unto Me is final destination.”
(Surah Luqman: 14)

In these verses of the Qur'an, the pregnancy period and the period of breastfeeding are specifically mentioned along with the commandment of Allah to a person to be dutiful and thankful to his/her parents. This is an important point that needs further clarification. Ibn al- Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in his book *Kitaab ar-Ruh* (The Book of Soul) mentions that the human soul has five kinds of connections to the body and the first connection between the soul and body of a person occurs while the person is in the womb of his/her mother.¹¹⁶ This has profound implications in the later life.

Recently, interesting scientific research has emerged regarding the relationship between the pregnant mother and

¹¹⁶ Ibn Al-Qayyim, al-Jawziyyah (1997). *Kitaab ur-Rooh* (in Urdu). Lahore, Shabbir Brothers.

the fetus in her womb. We now know that the heart of the unborn child develops and starts pumping long before the brain comes into existence. Even though the actual factor that triggers the heartbeat of the unborn child is unknown, it is very likely that the mother's heartbeat triggers that of the unborn child who is in her womb.

In 1940s, Lester Sontag, M.D. discovered that the mother's heartbeat affects the heartbeat of unborn child in the womb in many ways.¹¹⁷ The unconscious memory of the mother's heartbeat, while the child was in the womb, remains in the child even after the birth of child and for the rest of his or her life. Several scientific researches support this view. It was shown that when the heartbeat sound was played on a tape-recorder in a hospital nursery, it reduced the infant crying in the nursery. Thomas Verny, M.D. in his famous book "*The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*" has argued that it is due to unconscious memory of the mother's heartbeat that, after the birth, a child feels comforted when it is held to somebody's chest or an adult goes to sleep while listening to the steady ticking of the clock and that could possibly be the reason why people in the office are very rarely distracted by the rhythmic clacking of typewriters or other such things.¹¹⁸ Some people who suffer from insomnia (loss of sleep) use sound machines, which actually mimic the sound of a heart beat.

The motherly sacrifices for her child include not only the long and difficult pregnancy period but also the moment of

¹¹⁷ Bernard, J. & Sontag, L. (1947). Fetal Reactions to Sound. Journal of Genetic Psychology **70**, 209-210.

¹¹⁸ Verny, Thomas M.D. & Kelley, John (1981). The Secret Life of the Unborn Child. New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc.

delivery, which is intensely painful. In Surah Al-Ahqaf, Allah says: “*We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him (during pregnancy), and in pain did she give him birth.*” (Surah Al-Ahqaf: ayah 15) Similarly, in Surah Luqman, Allah says: “*And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents, unto Me is the final destination.*” (Surah Luqman: ayah 14) According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), a woman who dies while pregnant or after birth to a child is considered to be a “shaheeda” (a martyr in the sight of Allah). Raashid ibn Hubaysh narrated that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Being killed for the sake of Allah is martyrdom, the plague is martyrdom, drowning is martyrdom, stomach disease is martyrdom, and if a woman dies during the post-partum period, her child will drag her to Paradise by his umbilical cord. [The umbilical cord is that which is cut by the midwife when the child is born.]”

(Musnad Ahmed) ¹¹⁹

Similarly, in another tradition narrated by ‘Ubaadah ibn al-Saamit, Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

“The one who is killed for the sake of Allah is a shaheed; the one who dies of plague is a shaheed; the one who dies of a stomach disease is a shaheed; the

119 Ibn Hanbal, Ahmed al-Musnad, Vol. 3/ pg. 489. The chain of narration of this hadeeth is graded as authentic (*saheeh*) by Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal. There is a corroborating report narrated by Maalik in his Muwatta (1/233) and Abu Dawood in his sunan (3/482).

woman who dies with a child in her womb is a shaheed.”

(Musnad Ahmed) ¹²⁰

As compared to all the animals, human beings are large brained and large skulled. For this reason, as Robert Bly writes, “The large head, as it is and has been, makes birth an intensely painful experience for the human female”.¹²¹ Again, this is a sacrifice the mother gives to bring her child into this world.

Biologists tell us that reproductive strategies are different in males and females. American sociologist and biologist Robert Trivers noted that the burden of “parental investment” is extraordinarily higher in the case of females compared to males. What Trivers meant was that the human female makes a huge investment in a child, i.e. starting with nine months of metabolic commitment, followed by a further period before the end of breast-feeding. On the other hand, the male’s “parental investment” is very little.¹²² The male parental investment is only indirect, i.e. providing food or defense for the young.

When we look at the biology of the female hormonal pattern, it is dominated by estrogen and oxytocin, the two hormones which generate strong nurturing instincts in the

¹²⁰ Ibn Hanbal, Ahmed al-Musnad, Vol. 5/ pg. 315. Also narrated by Ibn Majah and by Ibn Hibbaan in his *Saheeh*. Ibn Habbab said that the chain of narration of this hadeeth is *saheeh*.

¹²¹ Bly, Robert (1996). The Sibling Society. New York, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

¹²² Trivers, Robert L. (1972) Parental investment and sexual selection. In B. Campbell (Ed.) Sexual selection and the descent of man, 1871-1971 (pp 136-179). Chicago, Aldine.

mother (in fact, oxytocin is also known as the love-hormone due to its role in stimulating milk ejection during lactation and in the mother-child bond). The hormones predominant in males, on the other hand, are testosterone and adrenaline, which may be useful in competition as huntsmen and warriors but of little significance in terms of caring for children. Therefore, mothers have a far greater investment to lose if they neglect their children. If a child dies due to lack of care, this represents a greater potential failure for the mother than for the father.

The status of the mother is far higher than the father in Islamic teachings for this reason. The secret of her importance lies in the tremendous burden and responsibility that is placed upon her, and the difficulties that she has to shoulder - responsibilities and difficulties some of which man does not bear. This is why one of the most important obligations upon a person is to show gratitude to their mother, and kindness and good companionship with her. And in this matter, she is to be given precedence over and above the father.

Nurturing Role of Mother

To the Communists, the role of men seemed simple enough that it could be substituted by a few bureaucrats overseeing the machines of mass production. To the sexual liberals, the role of women is, similarly, simple enough that it can be taken over by child day-care centers. However, the reality is completely different from the wishful thinking of feminists. As George Gilder pointed out, the mother's role is filled with continuous challenges, far beyond her nurturing of infants. Raising several children is a project that needs constant attentiveness. Due to its continual and

varied demands, this is not a role that most men show serious interest to perform. If truth be told, most divorced men, after they obtain guardianship of their children, immediately hand over their children again to girlfriends, new wives, female servants or day-care centers.¹²³

Among the effects of testosterone include providing focus to the brain while performing different tasks. As we discussed earlier, male brain is already very compartmentalized with different areas of the brain performing different functions. On top of this, testosterone provides more focus to the brain. Hence, when engaged in a task, male brains are not easily distracted. This quality is important for someone doing a job in the outside world. However, such quality is not desirable for the care of children who need attention every moment in the home while the mother is engaged in other tasks. In fact, unifocal brain is a disaster when it comes to the care and nurture of children. For this reason, no one is better equipped for caring for children than a mother. In fact, research has shown that female hormones tend to make women romantic, caring, nurturing, and sensitive.^{124, 125} In this context, we can easily understand the following Prophetic tradition. Anas ibn Malik narrates that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

¹²³ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

¹²⁴ Dalton, K. (1976). "Prenatal progesterone and educational attainments." British Journal of Psychiatry **129**: 438-442.

¹²⁵ Ehrhardt, A. A. and Meyer-Bahlburg, H.F.L. (1981). "Effects of prenatal sex hormones on gender-related behaviour." Science **211**: 1312-1314.

تزوجوا الودود الولود فإني مكاثر بكم الأمم يوم القيامة

(سنن أبي داؤد)

“Marry women who are loving and prolific (in producing children), for I shall outnumber the (other) nations by you on the Day of Judgment.” (Sunan Abu Dawud, no. 2043 & Musnad Ahmad)¹²⁶

To sum up, the role of mother can never be underestimated. Maintaining the home and nurturing the future generations are tasks that are as important as earning the money to pay for food, clothing and education. A mother is a home executive who strives to manage her household with skill, thrift, and thoughtfulness.

Breast-fed is Best-fed

Over fifty years ago, many mothers in Europe and America started to bottle-feed their children because they thought it backward to breast-feed. Research, however, has shown that breast-fed infants are more intelligent than bottle-fed infants. The most well-known research in this area is that by Alan Lucan, of Cambridge University, who compared premature babies fed either breast milk or infant formula. At the age of 8, the breast-fed children averaged 8.3 points higher on IQ tests. Bottle fed infants are about two to three times more likely to suffer from diarrheal diseases. The interesting reason found by the researchers is that the milk sugars found specifically in human milk can actually trick the bacteria. The shape of those human milk sugars resembles certain structures in the intestine which the

¹²⁶ This hadeeth has been regarded as Saheeh (authentic) by Sheikh Albaani in Arwaa ul Ghaleel, hadeeth no. 1784.

bacteria attack to cause diarrhea. Hence, when the bacteria bind to those milk sugars by mistake, they are easily excreted out of the body and those bacteria fail to cause diarrhea in the breast-fed infants.

The action of sucking on the mother's breasts improves a newborn's ability to breathe. Medical studies have demonstrated that compared with breast-fed babies, those fed by bottle contracted "four times as many respiratory infections ... twenty-one times more asthma, and twenty-seven times more hay fever." In fact, the researchers of the study concluded that vigorous sucking on a breast was actually necessary to promote good breathing habits in infants during the early days of their lives.¹²⁷ There are a myriad of other obvious benefits of breast-feeding over bottle-feeding.¹²⁸ Jack Newman, M.D. emphasized the importance of breast-feeding in the December 1995 issue of the *Scientific American* in the following words:

*"And although it is not the norm in most industrial cultures, UNICEF and the World Health Organization both advise breast-feeding to 'two Years and beyond.' Indeed, a child's immune response does not reach its full strength until age five or so."*¹²⁹

It is interesting to note that the UNICEF and WHO have

¹²⁷ Montagu, Ashley (1972) Touching: The Human Significance of Skin. New York, Columbia Univ. Press. *Quoted in:* Sanders, Barry A is for ox

¹²⁸ Blum, Deborah (1996). Is Mother's milk key to child's growth, future? Sacramento Bee **July 8**, A-1.

¹²⁹ Newman, Jack (1995). How Breast Milk Protects Newborns Scientific American **Dec 1995**.

only now reached the wisdom which was revealed in the Qur'an about 1400 years ago, i.e. to breast-feed at least for 2 years:

﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَدَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ﴾

"Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years."
(Surah Al-Baqarah: 233)

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ
وَفِصْلُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدِكَ إِلَيَّ
الْمَصِيرُ﴾

"And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship (during pregnancy) and stopping of his breastfeeding is in two years – Give thanks to Me and your parents." (Surah Luqman: ayah 14)

Breast-feeding and Socialization of a Child

Breast-feeding has far-reaching consequences on the development of socialization skills of a child during his/her later life. The wet nurse of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was Haleema Saadia. She was from the tribe of Banu Saad, a tribe which was notable among the Arabs in its superb eloquence. Hence, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was nursed by the woman from the most

eloquent tribe.¹³⁰ It might be for this reason that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was noted for his superb eloquence and fluency in Arabic. He was an accurate, unpretending straightforward speaker. He had the strength, clarity and eloquence of Bedouin language.. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself said:

بُعِثْتُ بِجَوَامِعِ الْكَلِمِ. (صحيح بخاری)

“I have been given the keys of eloquent speech.”

(Sahih Bukhari, Book on Interpretation of Dreams)

By breast-feeding, a mother passes more than just milk to the child. Biologist Yitzhak Koch, a nutrition professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science notes: “The main point is that milk is not just a source of nutritional elements, some simple mixture of fats, sugars and salts. It has a causal effect on the infant. It’s really a vehicle by which the mother transfers information to the child.”¹³¹ Barry Sanders is former professor of the History of Ideas at Pitzer College (California). He opines in his book *A is for Ox* that, during breastfeeding, all five senses in the infant are activated simultaneously and the infant ingests not only milk but also the “metaphoric extensions of milk” such as flexibility, rhythm and language. An infant learns by listening to the

¹³⁰ Ibn Sa'd, Abu Abdullah Muhammad (1993). *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*. New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan. Vol. 1, part 1. Ibn Sa'd said that Muhammad ibn Umar informed us that Zakariya ibn Yahya ibn Yazid al-Sa'di informed us on the authority of his father; he said: The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “*I am the most eloquent of you because I come from the tribe of the Quraysh and my speech is that of Banu Saad ibn Bakr.*”

¹³¹ Blum, Deborah (1996). Is Mother's milk key to child's growth, future? Sacramento Bee **July 8**, A-1.

articulation of sounds. Being in close contact with the mother's heart, the infant hears the most essential sound which is the sound of mother's heartbeat. The mother's words and sentences enter into an infant's ears. Each time the mother utters something, the infant tries to imitate those sounds by moving the facial muscles.¹³² In point of fact, in a research study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers Hoefer and Hardy concluded that infants "breast fed for four to nine months advance more quickly mentally, learning to talk and walk at an earlier age."¹³³ Joseph Chilton Pearce, another expert in the area of child development, provides further evidence in this regard by citing the example of infants born to mothers who can not speak or hear. It has been found that "infants born to deaf-mute mothers have no repertoire of muscular movements to speech, and make no such movements until there is prolonged and close contact with a speaking person or persons."¹³⁴

According to psychologists, 75% of the child's personality is shaped in the first 3 years of its life. Robert Bly, commenting on the brain development of human infants after birth, writes: "At birth, the rhesus monkey, for example, has a brain that is already 65 percent of its final

¹³² Sanders, Barry (1995). A is for ox. New York, Vintage Books.

¹³³ Hoefer, C. & Hardy, M.C. (1929). "Later Development of Breast Fed and Artificially Fed Infants." Journal of the American Medical Association **96**: 615-619.

¹³⁴ Pearce, Joseph Chilton (1992). Evolution's End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence. New York, HarperSanFrancisco.

size; the chimpanzee brain is 40.5 percent of its final size; but the human baby's brain is only 23 percent. That means that three-quarters of the skull growth takes place after birth."¹³⁵ The normal development of the human brain cannot be accomplished without the help of parents. In fact, the human infant lives in the shadow of his parents. Research done by psychologists and other social scientists has shown that the body contact of the child to its mother is extremely important in the mental development of a child. One of the ways this mother-child body contact can be accomplished is when the mother is breast-feeding her child.

Breast-feeding and Humanization of a Child

Breast-feeding humanizes a child whereas bottle-feeding tends to mechanize them. While nursing, a mother actually transfers not only nutrients but also human love to her child. Researcher James W. Prescott, Ph.D. of the Institute of Humanistic Science asserts that sensory stimulation is like a nutrient, essential for the normal growth, development and functioning of the brain.¹³⁶ Serotonin, one of the brain neurochemicals, is shown to be significantly reduced under conditions of failed mother-infant

¹³⁵ Bly, Robert, The Sibling Society (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996)

¹³⁶ Prescott, James W. (Spring 1997). Breastfeeding: Brain Nutrients in Brain Development for Human Love and Peace. Touch the Future Newsletter.
<http://www.violence.de/prescott/ttf/article.html>

affectional bonding. Dr. Prescott also provides evidence from studies which have documented that depressed adults, violent persons and criminals have shortage of brain serotonin, especially those persons with a history of suicidal and assaultive/homicidal behaviors. It has not been realized well enough that another chemical in our body, tryptophan, which is necessary for the development of brain serotonin is richly present in colostrum and breast milk but it is absent in formula milk. According to Dr. Prescott, millions of years of evolutionary biology have naturally kept a balance in the normal psychophysiological growth of the infant through the process of breastfeeding, i.e. sensory stimulation by keeping the body contact of mother/child during breastfeeding and maintaining adequate levels of brain serotonin levels. He writes: "Only in the human mammal do we find the newborn separated from its mother at birth and the mother not breastfeeding its newborn and infant."¹³⁷ The increasing emphasis in our industrialized societies to place infants and children in day care centers guarantees the lack of affectional bonding between mother and infant/child. Based on his study of different "primitive" cultures of the world where weaning age is 2.5 years or longer combined with his scientific findings about sensory deprivation in the case of bottle-feeding and deficits of brain serotonin levels in persons with criminal or aberrant behavior, Dr. Prescott challenges the criminal justice system in the following words:

"For all of the above reasons (and others), it has been my challenge to the criminal justice system to find one murderer, rapist or drug addict in any correctional facility in America who has been breastfed for "two

¹³⁷ Ibid.

years and beyond", as recommended by the *World Health Organization*. My proposed studies of adults who have been breastfed for "two years and beyond", when conducted, would provide a strong data base to support the above stated relationships and to call for a national health policy that would support mothers being nurturant mothers that would include breastfeeding for "two years and beyond". If such a national health policy were to be implemented, it would transform our culture of violence into a culture of peace."¹³⁸

Donald Woods Winnicott was a British pediatrician and psychoanalyst. During his career, he had the opportunity to treat psychically disturbed children and their mothers upon whom he built his concepts of "holding environment" and "security blanket". As a pediatrician and psychoanalyst, he reached the following conclusion regarding the role of a mother in the society which he has aptly summed up in his book *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*:

"In the last half century there has been a great increase in awareness of the value of the home. We know something of the reasons why this long and exacting task, the parents' job of seeing their children through, is a job worth doing....

I am concerned with the mother's relation to her baby just before the birth and in the first weeks and months after birth. I am trying to draw attention to the immense contribution to the individual and to society that the ordinary good mother with her husband in support makes at the beginning, and which she does simply through being devoted to her infant...

¹³⁸ Ibid.

[We must strive] to give moral support to the ordinary good mother, educated or uneducated, clever or limited, rich or poor, and to protect her from everyone and everything that gets between her baby and herself.”¹³⁹

Mother in Home – The Last Bastion against Immorality

It is the mother’s love for her children which nurtures humane qualities in the children. It has been narrated in a prophetic tradition that a man came to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the worthiest of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your father. (Sahih Bukhari, *kitab al-adab* – Book of Good Manners and Form)

The reason our holy Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of the mother much more than the father is because no human bond is stronger than the mother-child bond. Social scientists carried out experiments in which they asked fathers to be closer to the infants’ right from their birth. However, within a few weeks, in spite of the fathers’ deep involvement in childcare, mothers were still much closer to the children. In another experiment, social scientists exposed the babies after their birth to many different caregivers other than the

¹³⁹ Winnicott, D. W. (1990). Home Is Where We Start from: Essays by a Psychoanalyst. New York, W. W. Norton & Company.

mother. The result of the experiment revealed that the babies were confused and they wanted their natural mothers back.¹⁴⁰ When confused children grow up, they try to find comfort by indulging in the vices of the society. It is the mother who assumes charge of the domestic values of the community including its moral, social and religious concerns. In fact, a mother in the home with her child is the last fortress against the onslaughts of immorality prevalent in the society.

Motherhood, Orality and Literacy

Mothers are the primary vehicles transmitting oral culture to the next generations. Barry Sanders writes in his book *A is for Ox* that the basis of every civilization is an oral book. People transmit to next generations the sacred oral traditions of that book, which become the foundation of a literary civilization. For example, the source of Hindu civilization was the *Vedas*. The starting point of Jewish civilization was the *Torah*. The foundation of Greek civilization was Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The origin of Christian civilization was the *Bible*. Similarly, the basis of Islamic civilization was the *Qur'an*. The first book in the Arabic language is the Qur'an - "Al-Kitaab" (the Book) as it is rightly said in the Qur'an itself:

﴿ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢﴾﴾

"This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt. A guidance for those who fear Allah." (Surah Al-Baqarah: 2) The lap of a mother is the first school of a child. She transmits the sacred oral traditions of the culture to her

¹⁴⁰ Rossi, Alice S. (1977). "A biosocial perspective on parenting." *Daedalus* **106**: 1-32.

children and it is this orality which becomes the basis of literacy. Sanders lamented that when women in Western countries left home for the workplace, this departure spelled disaster for literacy. With the mother absent from the home, a crucial tie connecting the child to its development in literacy disintegrates.¹⁴¹

It is the mother who binds the family and a strong family itself is crucial in keeping orality and, hence, literacy in its members. Sanders accentuated this relationship in the following words: “Like all relationships, the one between family and literacy is reciprocal. Literacy has kept the family alive – through discussions, critical analysis, stories, arguments, and conversation. In so far as the computer has helped to erase the inner core of the human being – conspiring, that is, in the obliteration (*ob-littera* = “the erasure of letters”) of stories and storytelling – it has hastened the destruction of the family. The family wraps itself around the dynamic core of orality.”¹⁴²

Child Daycare Centers and Old Age Homes – A Direct Proportionality

There exists a profound relationship between nursing homes and the child daycare centers in a society. This can be better understood by an age-old saying which can be considered as the “law of the circle of life” – *If you do good to your parents, your children will do good to you.*

The presence of day care centers and the old age nursing

¹⁴¹ Sanders, Barry (1995). A is for ox. New York, Vintage Books.

¹⁴² Ibid.

homes are an indicator that the balance of social duties in the society has been disturbed. Qur'an warns us:

﴿وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ﴾

“And do not disturb the balance.”

(Surah Ar-Rahman: verse 9)

When children are raised devoid of parental love (especially motherly affection) by being placed in daycare centers, they eventually vent their anger against their parents when they later reach old age. In addition, social scientific studies of neutrally reared children inform us that the artificial elimination of the mother-child bond can not reduce sex differences in boys and girls and interferes in the healthy development of the child. This only confuses the child. Social scientist Alice Rossi notes: “Communally reared children, far from being liberated, are often neglected, joyless creatures.”¹⁴³

Listen to the advice of Barry Sanders to every mother: “Every mother – from poor who need to work to survive, to rich mothers who work as a luxury – needs to return to the home, at least until their babies move out of infancy. Even after that they need to make their presence felt in the home. If healthy, these mothers need to breast-feed their infants.... It also means that the mother cannot live on the streets but must take up full residence in the home.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Rossi, Alice S. (1985). *Gender and Parenthood. Gender and Life Course.* (ed.) Alice S. Rossi. New York, Aldine. Quoted in: *Brain Sex* by Anne Moir

¹⁴⁴ Sanders, Barry (1995). *A is for ox.* New York, Vintage Books.

In 1998, it was reported in the *Chicago Tribune* that nearly sixty percent of the residents of American old age homes never receive a visitor. Owing to the fact that females have longer life-expectancy than males, women in Western countries after spending their youthful years working outside the home eventually have to face “a decade of solitary confinement at the end, staring into television screens, recycling memories, and fingering months-old greetings cards from relatives who rarely if ever appear.”¹⁴⁵

Contemporary Bosnian Muslim intellectual, Alija Ali Izetbegovic, in his path breaking book, *Islam between East and West*, has aptly summarized the relationship between child daycare centers and old age homes:

“Homes for the aged go together with children’s homes. They belong to the same order of things, and are in fact, two states of the same solution. Children’s homes and homes for the aged remind us of artificial birth and artificial death. Both are characterized by the presence of comfort and by the absence of love and warmth. Both are opposed to the family and are the result of the changed role of woman in human life. Their common feature is the elimination of parental relationships: in a nursery, children are without parents; in homes for the aged, parents are without children.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) (April 1999). “Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender”. (www.masudkhan.co.uk)

¹⁴⁶ Izetbegovic, 'Alija 'Ali (1994). Islam Between East and West. Indiana, American Trust Publications. Izetbegovic was the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chapter 6

Career or Family – What Do the Majority of Women Want?

THERE ARE TWO BASIC PICTURES of a woman's life: One portrayed in the media – in Hollywood movies, Bollywood movies, TV dramas of every country of the world. The other picture is the real-life situation. Women in the world of virtual reality (TV, internet, movies, and magazines) are shown as overwhelmingly career-loving. However, when we carefully analyze what women all over the world really want and end up choosing, we see that it is very different from the image of women portrayed in movies and dramas. A look at job statistics in some of the most advanced countries of the world makes it clear that the majority of the women prefer their families over their careers.

The rights of women in the current Western society were not granted to them out of kindness. Modern women reached their present position by force, and not through divine teachings. In addition, a shortage of manpower during wars, the pressure of economic needs and the requirements of the industrial revolution all forced Western women to leave their homes to struggle for their livelihood and to appear as equal to men.

Islam is not against working women. In fact, Muslim women are much needed in professions like gynecology, female surgeons (for any type of surgery of female patients), dentistry, nursing and teaching, to name a few. Similarly, there are situations where women have to work, such as in the case of the death of the husband, divorce and scarce earnings of the husband when feeding the children becomes impossible with only the father's earnings, etc. However, Islam is against degrading the role of the mother. Islam is against dragging or tempting the women out of their secure homes into the career market in the name of "freedom" and the women's liberation movement".

Islam is against making women career-oriented instead of being family-oriented because Islam is a religion in complete accordance with human nature. The majority of women in the world by their nature still prefer their families over their career. Let's see in this chapter as to what do majority of women want: career or family?

Work-force Participation of Women

A careful look at the participation of single women in the work-force in the U.S. shows that their participation has not increased much since 1950.¹⁴⁷ The only statistical change that has occurred is the increase in the ratio of work-force participation of married women. However, the majority of those married women prefer part-time or seasonal work located near their homes. According to the data from the

¹⁴⁷ Fuchs, Victor R. (1983). How We Live: An Economic Perspective on Americans from Birth to Death. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

U.S. Census Bureau, only 35 percent of all women between the ages of twenty and sixty-five were holding full time jobs in 1983. Furthermore, only a little more than 20 percent of the wives worked full time all year and women in intact families were earning only 16.5 percent of the total family income.¹⁴⁸ In general, American women seem to prefer to stay home and concentrate on their families. They perform full time work only when the necessity of the situation forces them to do so, for instance, in the situations of the desertion, divorce, death, or insufficient earnings of their husbands.¹⁴⁹

A national survey conducted in 1982 by Louis Harris and Associates for General Mills has enough evidence to indicate that most women would prefer to stay home with their families and that full-time job participation is not their life's goal. The results from the survey show that 39 percent of women prefer to work only at home and another 14 percent would prefer to do only volunteer work, making a total of 53 percent women who do not want to be in the job market outside the home at all. Another 32 percent want only part-time work, which means only 12 percent of the American women want full-time employment in the labor

¹⁴⁸ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company. Data computed by George Gilder from Census Bureau, "Money Income," Tables 46 and 31. Also unpublished data for 1983 from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

¹⁴⁹ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

force.¹⁵⁰

Despite the attempt of a small but vocal minority of feminists to separate (they call it “to liberate”) women from the family and children and to bring them into the work force, the majority of women, owing to their feminine intuition, know very well that when both parents work outside the home, it has detrimental effects on the well-being of children. For this reason, the majority of women have different goals and priorities compared to men. Women do not look for income as the top priority in their work. For the very same reason, when they do have to work, they demand jobs close to their homes, mostly part time. Women mostly prefer to take a central child-care role in the family because they know that they are the ones who keep the whole family bound together.

Housewives in America – Happy or Unhappy?

When Betty Friedan's controversial book *The Feminine Mystique* was first published in the United States in 1963, feminists were ecstatic. In this book, Friedan defines women's unhappiness as “the problem that has no name,” then she launches into a detailed exploration of what she believes causes this problem. According to Friedan, women have been encouraged to confine themselves to the narrow roles of housewife and mother, forsaking education and career aspirations in the process. Friedan attempts to prove that the feminine mystique denies women the opportunity

¹⁵⁰ Louis Harris Public Opinion Poll conducted for Virginia Slims, 1982. *Quoted in:* Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

to develop their own identities, which can ultimately lead to problems for women and their families. The results are the formation of American suburbs which are the centers of American child care in single family dwellings.¹⁵¹ Indeed, feminists like Friedan shed crocodile tears in public about the housewives who are isolated from the community, driven crazy by their babies and the victims of male oppression.

Was Friedan truthful in her observations and conclusions? What is the underlying truth? Two American sociologists investigated the condition of the type of housewives who were portrayed as victims by Friedan. One of the sociologists was Herbert J. Gans who studied Levittown, Pennsylvania, a typical American suburb. The other sociologist was Helen Znaniecki Lopata who carried out 573 personal interviews of women in the suburbs of Chicago. Both sociologists found that people, especially women, greatly enjoyed their suburban lifestyle and were amongst the happiest and least isolated of all Americans.

Both Lopata and Gans found a better quality of life for housewives as compared to working women in their studies. For example, Lopata discovered that suburban housewives were more likely than working women to use their education in their lives in various ways, such as teaching their kids at home, reading books on every subject, and being active in community affairs. They were also better able to maintain friendships. As a matter of fact, most of the working women interviewed were looking forward to quitting their jobs to take on the role of a housewife. Lopata

¹⁵¹ Friedan, Betty (2001). The Feminine Mystique. New York, Norton. pp. 345-359.

noted:

“The role of the housewife provides her a base for rebuilding a many-faceted life, an opportunity few other vocational roles allow, because they are tied down to single organizational structures and goals.”¹⁵²

Similarly, Gans discovered in his study that only 10 percent of suburban women reported frequent loneliness or boredom.¹⁵³ Therefore, we can see here that the cry of the feminist writer Betty Friedan was only a myth about the housewife.

A similar observation was made by anthropologist Margaret Mead in her book *Men & Women* when she noted that women are most satisfied not when they are granted “influence, power, and wealth” but when “the female role of wife and mother is exalted.” Moreover, Mead argued that a devaluing of the creative role of a mother makes women unhappy in the home.¹⁵⁴

There are biological reasons why men and women are good at different tasks. Most women do a good amount of work at home while most men do a different type of work in factories or offices. In reality, one type of work is not better than the other. Just because men are paid for their work in

¹⁵² Lopata, Helen Z., (1971) Occupation Housewife. New York: Oxford University Press. Quoted in: Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

¹⁵³ Gans, Herbert J., (1967) The Levittowners. New York: Pantheon. Quoted in: Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

¹⁵⁴ Mead, Margaret (1949). Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World. New York, Morrow.

the outside world while women are not paid for their home-management does not make the work of men superior to that of women. We know that prostitutes are paid for their work but this does not make their work superior to that of mother.

Furthermore, for many women, compared to career excitement or earning a financial fortune or world fame, there is much more thrill and satisfaction in having and caring for babies. This is aptly summed up by Anne Morrow Lindbergh in her book *Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead* in which she described her own priorities. Lindbergh (1906 – 2001) was a pioneering American aviator, author, and the spouse of fellow aviator Charles Lindbergh. Despite her adventures in aviation and her world fame, Lindbergh described what gave her the most satisfaction:

“The sheer fact of finding myself loved was unbelievable and changed my world, my feelings about life and myself. I was given confidence, strength, and almost a new character. The man I was to marry believed in me and what I could do, and consequently, I found I could do more than I realized, even in that mysterious outer world that fascinated me but seemed unattainable. He opened the door to ‘real life.’ ... The first months of motherhood were totally normal, joyful, and satisfying and I would have been content to stay home and do nothing else but care for my baby. This was ‘real life’ at its most basic level.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Lindbergh, Anne Morrow (1993). Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead. New York, Mariner Books.

Psychological Changes in Women during Menstrual Cycles

Men and women differ in terms of their reproductivenatures. Women, owing to their creative nature, have well-defined monthly reproductive cycles marked by the rise and fall of certain sex hormones. About one week before the beginning of menstruation, the levels of the sex hormones progesterone and estrogen fall to their lowest levels in women. In this state, when there is suddenly much less progesterone to soothe the mood and much less estrogen to promote feelings of comfort, women may suffer mood and behavior changes from aggression and hostility to severe depression.¹⁵⁶ In this premenstrual syndrome (PMS), due to monthly hormonal effects, women may suffer from mood changes including mild depression, irritability, tearfulness and lethargy as well as physical changes including tiredness, dizziness and headache/sore throat. When PMS symptoms become severe among women, the condition is called premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), a condition characterized by extreme mood swings, disrupting their work and damaging their relationships. Around 30 percent of women suffer PMS symptoms, and up to 8 percent of women experience the symptoms of PMDD which can be devastating.¹⁵⁷ In fact,

¹⁵⁶ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

¹⁵⁷ Gallenberg, Mary M. (M.D.) <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pmdd/AN01372>. Retrieved on: Sept. 11, 2011.

in the French penal code, PMS condition is placed under the category of temporary insanity.¹⁵⁸

In one study, it was found that during PMS and the menstrual period, about 50 percent of acute psychiatric and medical admissions are made to the hospital.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, it has been found that 50 percent of female prisoners commit their crimes during the times of their premenstrual or menstrual periods. The reported incidents of suicide attempts can increase 17-fold among women during the premenstrual period. Furthermore, statistics show that the incidents of plane crashes are much higher when the women pilots are in their premenstrual or menstrual periods.^{160,161} In an important study on this syndrome, researchers Meleges and Hamburg noted:

“The psychological changes that occur during this phase of the menstrual cycle can have serious consequences for a susceptible woman and also for

¹⁵⁸ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

¹⁵⁹ Stone, Michael H. (1982). “Premenstrual tension in borderline and related disorders”. Behaviour and the Menstrual Cycle. R.C. Friedman (ed.). New York, Dekker: 317-343.

¹⁶⁰ Dalton, K. (1982). “Premenstrual tension: an overview”. Behaviour and the Menstrual Cycle. R.C. Friedman (ed.). New York, Dekker: 317-343.

¹⁶¹ Moyer, Kenneth Evan (1987). Violence and Aggression: A Physiological Perspective. New York, Paragon House.

society at large, and should not be looked upon as a minor nuisance.”¹⁶²

Islam is well aware of the fact that there is a profound difference in the physiology of men and women. Since men do not suffer from the hormonal effects of the reproductive cycle, they are given the responsibility of dealing with the hostile outside world of strangers and continuously earning a livelihood for their wives and children. Men do not suffer from biological breaks and hormonal disturbances every month as women do. Therefore, men are the financial caretakers and breadwinners for their family. It is their religious obligation. Women, who suffer from the hormonal effects before and during their menstrual periods every month, are encouraged to focus their energies in the friendly environment of home. Compared to the outside world, at home a woman's husband and her children will be more accommodating to her mood changes as well as physical changes during her monthly periods.

Islam cares so much for women that in the Islamic law (*fiqh*), if a husband divorces his wife during her menstrual periods, it will not be accepted.¹⁶³ An underlying wisdom

¹⁶² Meleges, F.T. and Hamburg, D.A. (1976). Psychological effects of hormonal changes in women. Human Sexuality in Four Perspectives. F.A. (ed.) Beach. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University.

¹⁶³ According to Abdullah ibn Umar and some of the taabi'een as well as Islamic scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim and contemporary scholars such as Ibn Baaz and Ibn Uthaymeen, divorce of a menstruating woman does not count as such because Allaah says in the Qu'ran: "O Prophet! When you divorce women, divorce them at their 'Iddah (prescribed periods) and count (accurately) their 'Iddah " (Surah al-Talaaq: 1) Further evidence on this issue comes from the

in such command could be that a wife might be more irritable during her menstrual periods as it was shown in the above-mentioned scientific research. Similarly, men have been commanded to perform the five daily obligatory prayers in the mosque whereas for women, as mentioned in the Prophetic traditions, it is preferred to perform the five prayers at home. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said concerning women praying in the mosques: “Their houses are better for them.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 567’ classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abu Dawud). Women are also exempt to attend the weekly Friday prayers (*Sunan Abu Dawud*). All these concessions granted to women in the Islamic teachings show how much Islam cares for women and their female body’s physiology.

Effects of Both Parents Working on the Mental Health of Children

In a Harris national public opinion poll reported in the fourth annual *American Family Report*, in response to the question: “Do you think the trend toward both parents working outside the home has had a generally positive, a generally negative, or no effect at all on families?”, 52

hadeeth of Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, when he divorced his wife at the time of her menses. He told the Prophet (peace be upon him) about that and the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) got very angry and said: “Tell him to take her back, then keep her until she has become pure, then menstruated, then become pure, then if he wishes he may keep her after that and if he wishes he may divorce her.” Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “That is the prescribed period at which Allaah has commanded men to divorce women.” (Sahih Bukhari, Chapter on Divorce, hadeeth # 5251)

percent of Americans answered “generally negative.”¹⁶⁴ Hence, the majority of the American public perceived both parents working outside the home as having a negative influence on the family. This has been viewed practically in Sweden.

Allan Carlson states that until 1965, Sweden rejected the feminist ideologies and followed a similar social pattern to the U.S. with only one-fourth of the mothers with children entering the work force and more than half of them working only part time. However, over the next few years, the entire present agenda of feminism including universal day care, family-planning programs, and paternity leave for fathers was finally implemented. In the words of Carlson: “With the homemaker declared to be a ‘dying race,’ legal changes removed the special protections afforded women in marriage. Changes in Swedish tax law essentially eliminated the joint return for a married couple, and have left all persons paying the same tax, whether alone, married but childless, or married with children.... Swedish welfare policy was also altered to discourage maternal care of preschool children.”¹⁶⁵ Such and many other policies resulted in the destruction of the institution of marriage in Sweden. Furthermore, in a country which has the lowest death rate among its children, where education is free at all levels, where there is no problem of population density and

¹⁶⁴ Louis Harris and Associates Families at Work: Strength & Strains” The General Milles American Family Report 1980-81. General Mills, Inc. Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁶⁵ Carlson, Allan (July 1984). “Toward ‘The Working Family’: The Hidden Agenda Behind the Comparable Worth Debate,” Persuasion at Work : pp. 1-5 *Quoted in*: Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

where the per capita income of its residents is the one of the highest, the Swedish Parliament found it necessary to investigate the reasons for the rise in the number of mentally disturbed people. Dr. Hans Loman, a renowned psychiatrist was given the responsibility by the Swedish Parliament to investigate the reasons of this problem. Dr. Loman stated in one of the preliminary reports that in Sweden, as most married women are in the job market (about 70 percent mothers with children up to the age of 17), the vital institution of family has been seriously affected. Dr. Loman noted: "We have managed to create for our children an extraordinarily cold, anti-children society."¹⁶⁶

Commenting on the destruction of the family system in Sweden, Gilder affirms that the central lesson which we learn from the Swedish experience is that irreversible damage was inflicted on the whole society when mothers of small children were driven out of their homes and into the work force. In fact, women who stay at home are not performing some voluntary role which can be done more efficiently by the welfare state. Human resources are not "wasted" when women stay at home. Women play an extremely important role in the socialization of both men and children. When mothers leave their children at home in search of a career, the society has to pay the cost in the form of economic loss, population decline, crime committed by children and adults, drug addiction, divorce and mental sicknesses as pointed out by Gilder:

"Full-time work by mothers of small children comes at a serious twofold cost: first, the loss of the immeasurable

¹⁶⁶ Izetbegovic, 'Alija 'Ali (1994). Islam Between East and West. Indiana, American Trust Publications.

social benefit of the mother's love and care for her child; second, the frequent loss of the husband's full-time concentration on his career. The yield of the mother's job to the economy or the man's help in the home only rarely can offset these costs of her employment. The society will pay the costs one way or another.... The alternative to traditional family roles is not a unisex family; it is sexual suicide."¹⁶⁷

Men are the Protectors of Women

The Qur'an tells us that men are the protectors of women:

﴿الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ﴾

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women."
(Surah An-Nisa: 34)

Allah has enabled and entrusted men to protect, take care of and earn the bread for their families. To accomplish this task, Allah has granted men certain capabilities most suited for the sphere outside the home. Such qualities include risk taking, the male sense of confidence, aggressiveness, spatial abilities, a quest for power, etc. Whether it is father, brother or husband, Islam has made it their duty to take care of their daughter, sister, mother or wife, to spend on her, to provide her with the food, clothing and the shelter that she needs, to provide her with a good education, to protect her from anything that can harm her, to accompany her during long distance travels and to never hesitate to put their lives

¹⁶⁷ Gilder, George (2001). Men and Marriage. Louisiana, Pelican Publishing Company.

at stake for her if the need calls them to do so.

Allah has granted men certain skills and abilities in which they are superior to women and these include targeting, spatial building abilities and superior navigation abilities. As stated earlier, researchers at Virginia Tech found that the areas of the brain involved in targeting and spatial memory mature about 4 years earlier in boys than in girls. Similarly, researchers in France looked at the gender differences in spatial abilities at an early age. The title of their study published in *Archives of Diseases of Childhood* was "Are Boys Better than Girls at Building a Tower or a Bridge at 2 Years of Age?" They found that even at the age of two, a boy is about 3 times more likely than a girl to be able to build a bridge out of blocks.¹⁶⁸ Such skills are much needed for a breadwinner who is working outside the home.

Similarly, there is a significant difference among men and women when it comes to following directions. Men can more frequently use compass directions: north, south, east and west, when they travel but women can often only follow directions when visible landmarks are given to them. Why is this so? German psychiatrist Georg Grön and his colleagues at the University of Ulm wanted to investigate the reason as to why men and women are different in this regard. They used functional MRI to observe brain activation in male and female subjects as they searched for the way out of a complex, three-dimensional, virtual-reality maze. The results of the study revealed that women use an advanced area of the brain (cerebral cortex) for determining

¹⁶⁸ Labarthe, Jean Christopher (1997). "Are Boys Better Than Girls at Building a Tower or a Bridge at 2 Years of Age?" *Archives of Diseases of Childhood* **77**: 140-144.

driving directions. On the other hand, men use the hippocampus to determine directions and the hippocampus is that primitive area of the brain which is specialized for spatial navigation.¹⁶⁹ Hence, men tend to be better in navigation and following a map. In this context, the famous hadeeth of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) can also be better understood in which he said: “*A woman who believes in Allah and the Hereafter shall not travel for (a period of) a day and a night unless accompanied by a mahram (close male relative) of hers.*” (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim) This hadeeth also, of course, is based upon the additional wisdom that having a male with her will provide protection when dangers emerge.

The ability and confidence of men to manage affairs and act as the protectors of women can also be understood by studying the case of transgender individuals. Transgender men and women are those people who suffer from gender identity disorder. A medical diagnosis can be made if a person experiences discomfort as a result of a desire to be a member of the opposite sex, or if a person experiences impaired functioning or distress as a result of that gender identification. As a scientist, Dr. Leonard Sax argued that the experiences of transsexual persons can offer true insight into the experience of womanhood and manhood. As an example, he presents the case study of a young boy named James Boylan who always felt as if he were a girl confined in the body of a boy. Finally, at the age of forty, he had his

¹⁶⁹ Grön, George, et al. (2000) “Human brain activation during navigation: Gender-dependent neural networks as substrate of performance.” Nature Neuroscience 3: 404–408.

sex-change surgery and started to receive female hormone, estrogen injections as therapy. He changed his name from James to Jennifer Boylan. Five years later, Boylan wrote about her feelings as a man and then her feelings as a woman. Boylan stated: "The first thing I lost when I started taking estrogen was the sense of invulnerability and confidence I had always had as a man. As a guy, much of the turbulence of life just bounced off me, like a pebble hitting a windshield. As a woman, though, things tend to get under my skin. My sorrows and joys tend to lie very close to the surface now..."¹⁷⁰

This account of Boylan both as a man and then as a woman tells us about the fundamental differences in the way men and women perceive the world. Men are made protectors (*qawwamun*) of women, as mentioned in the Qur'an, precisely because of their risk-taking nature, their masculine confidence and sense of invulnerability, traits which are needed to cope with the outside world and to protect their wife and children. There is no question as to who is better and who is not. This is ingrained in the nature of the two sexes: in the selection of the future mate, women tend to focus most on the socioeconomic status (the ability to be a breadwinner of the family) of men whereas men tend to look for beauty in women. This is supported by many studies as noted earlier in this book.

Women by their nature prefer such men as their mates who are capable of protecting and providing for them. This has

¹⁷⁰ Boylan, Jennifer Finney (Sept. 2003). "Altered State: Living over 40 Years as a Man, Then Becoming a Woman, Still Didn't Answer All the Questions about the Opposite Sex." Allure 150-152.

been admitted by some of the staunchest supporters of feminism. For instance, feminist author Colette Dowling in her book *The Cinderella Complex* sorrowfully admitted that most women do have a secret desire to depend on a husband who will support and defend his wife.¹⁷¹

In the same vein, as noted earlier, Dr. Townsend's book *What Women Want – What Men Want* focuses on in-depth interviews that he conducted with 50 medical students, both male and female. In those interviews, while 85 percent of the men regarded physical attractiveness as the most important quality in their future soul mate, only 10 percent of the women gave this response.¹⁷² More importantly, not even one woman expressed an eagerness to marry a man who made less money than she would. As a matter of fact, a third of the female medical college students said they wanted a man who made them feel “protected” and “secure.” This is exactly what the Qur'an says when it talks about the two genders, keeping in view the nature of women:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى
بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾

*“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,
because Allah has made one of them to excel the*

¹⁷¹ Dowling, Colette (1981). *The Cinderella Complex*. New York, Summit Books.

¹⁷² Townsend, John Marshall (1998). *What Women Want – What Men Want: Why the Sexes Still See Love and Commitment So Differently*. New York, Oxford University Press.

other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means.” (Surah An-Nisaa [The Women]: 34)

In Islamic teachings, a woman has the same rights over a man as a man has over his wife, except that man, being the care-taker and protector of the affairs of women, has a degree (of advantage) (Qur'an 2:228). In Islam, the husband-wife relationship is not competitive but rather it is complementary – the two spouses complete each other's personality, skills, and responsibilities.

A Social Engineering Experiment on a Jewish Settlement and its Backfiring

Those who wish to “liberate” women in Muslim countries by interchanging the roles of men and women should learn a lesson from the first large-scale social engineering experiment conducted on the kibbutz scheme in Jewish-settled Palestine, founded in the year 1910.

The idea of the kibbutz scheme was to emancipate the women by eliminating the socialized gender roles from the earliest stages of childhood. The *kibbutzim* were collective farms in which maternal care was totally eliminated. Instead of living with parents, children were reared communally and lived in special dormitories. There were community laundries and kitchens in order to save women from the daily household duties of cooking and laundry. In this way, it was expected that with the passing of several sexually neutral generations, men and women would become gender-neutral and they would participate equally in positions of power. In addition, to make sure that the

socialization of children remain neutral, toys were kept in large baskets, so that boys and girls could freely chose their own toys, instead of forcing them to have gender-specific toys determined by adults.

After ninety years of continuous social engineering, the results were very disturbing for the social engineers. After the passing of three or four generations, the children of the kibbutz still cling to their traditional roles. The children always choose gender-specific toys. Three-year old boys consistently take cars and guns out of the toy baskets while the girls prefer to play with dolls and tea-sets.

In the kibbutz administration, there are quotas imposed to enforce female participation in leadership positions but they are rarely met. Women and men still ignore the unisex dress code. Tiger & Shepher, the authors of a study of women in the kibbutz note their observations about those women (on which social engineering attempts were made): “They have acted against the principles of their socialization and ideology, against the wishes of the men of their communities, against the economic interest of the kibbutzim, in order to be able to devote more time and energy to private maternal activities rather than to economic and political public ones.”¹⁷³

Hence, contrary to the expectations of the social engineers, the women in the kibbutz are actually returning to maternal roles. Nature does not change. This is the victory of the innate, divinely ordained biology of women over the Utopian gender-neutral vision, created by humans. In the

¹⁷³ Tiger, Lionel & Shepher, J. (1977). Women in the Kibbutz. London, Penguin Books.

words of Abdal Hakim Murad: “In Israel today, the *kibbutzim* harbour sex-distinctions which are famous for being sharper than those observable in Israeli society at large. The experiment has not only failed, it seems to have backfired.”¹⁷⁴

Men or Women: Who is a Better Home-Manager?

Owing to their different biology, men and women differ in their worldviews. In the Qur'an, Allah has commanded women to stay in their homes: “And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance...” [Surah Al Ahzab ayah 33]¹⁷⁵ Obviously, women are permitted to go out in the matters of need. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) permitted women to go out if there is a need. He said,

قَدْ أَذِنَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَخْرُجْنَ لِحَوَائِجِكُنَّ.

(صحيح بخاری)

¹⁷⁴ Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) "Boys will be boys: Gender Identity Issues." www.masudkhan.co.uk.

¹⁷⁵ It must be noted “Verses 33:32-3 are actually addressed to the wives of the Prophet (S), who had a unique position in society: ‘O wives of the Prophet, you are not like any of the (other) women. If you fear (Allah), be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire, but speak a speech (that is) just. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance...”

While the verses are specifically addressed to the Prophet’s wives, Muslim scholars assert that, since the Prophet’s wives were role models for all Muslim women, it behooves the latter to emulate them. Muslim women are generally not, however, obligated to follow the Prophet’s wives in all details, as the latter were special and unique.

“It is permissible for you (women) to go out for your needs.” (Sahih Bukhari, Book on Marriage). However, the commandment of Islam to women to stay in their homes, tells us about the nature of women and their superiority over men in the realm of home. Indeed, evidence supports this assertion.

When it comes to organization of the home, women tend to possess far more qualities superior to that of men. Most women still do the majority of the housework even if they are employed. For every two hours a man spends in domestic chores, a woman spends five hours helping around the house and delegating the duties to children.¹⁷⁶ Whether they are a working mom or staying-at-home mom, women always find themselves in the position of home managers, where they have to remind their husbands of their obligations. In actual fact, even in Scandinavian countries, where every attempt has been made to eliminate the traditional gender roles, child care, laundry, cleaning, washing and preparing food for the family are done by the wives in 70 percent of the families while husbands pay the bills and do the outside jobs.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, in the Jewish settlement experiment of Kibbutz as shown earlier, despite every possible attempt to reverse the roles of men and women, it has been found out that women do most of the house cleaning because they are

¹⁷⁶ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

¹⁷⁷ Hoyenga, K.B. & Hoyenga, K. (1980). Sex Differences. Boston, Little Brown and Company.

simply not impressed by their husbands' ability in this field. One husband admits: "I do what I can, but her [my wife's] standards for cleaning are too high. She says that if I did it, she'd just have to do it again."¹⁷⁸

The superiority of women over men in maintaining the home stems from differing worldviews of the two genders. The world of the job market is essentially a male-dominated world where the only worth is given to someone who proves himself or herself to possess the male qualities of competition and aggression. To women, the values which are the most important are compassion, love, relationship, security – the values which exist more in the home – and, hence, it is important to women if the houses are clean and they have friendly environment. For men, the office or the factory is as important as their homes, due to their breadwinner nature. Anne Moir explains this difference in the worldview of the two sexes:

"That 'pervasive force' lies in the very nature of the male and female brain. Men do not, indeed, 'see' the dirty glass ... mostly because clean glasses have a relatively low priority in their view of the world. To a woman, where the home is less of a motel, and more the backdrop to the relationships that matter to her, the dirty glass stands as an implicit rebuke to her own values."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Tiger, Lionel & Shepherd, J. (1977). Women in the Kibbutz. London, Penguin Books.

¹⁷⁹ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

Chapter 7

Why Separate-Sex Gatherings? Why not Mix Gatherings?

ISLAM CLEARLY DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN public and private space. The private space is physically divided from public space and it is strongly protected against any intrusion as commanded in Surah An-Noor (verses 27-29). In addition, Islam protects what people do in their private spheres by implementing bans on speculation, gossip and spying (Surah an-Noor: 12, 13 and Surah al-Hujurat: 11, 12).

Islam has given the Muslims a superior and comprehensive social system in which there is no room for unnecessary and reckless mixed gatherings. And based on its realistic approach to human nature, Islam is perfectly aware of the fact that free mixing of men and women breeds moral vices which are significantly culpable in the destruction of the moral fabric of many societies, as past and present societal experiences reveal. In the Qur'an, Allah says the following to the believing men and women:

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and guard their modesty. That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and

guard their modesty and not to show off their adornment.” (Surah An-Noor: 30, 31)

After these verses in Surah An-Noor, details of women’s hijab (modest dress) in front of non-mahrams are provided. Similarly, in Surah Al-Ahzab (verse 59), the commandments regarding a Muslim female’s dress outside the home are given. Likewise, Allah gave the commandment in Surah Al-Israa (verse 32) “*And come not near to adultery (or fornication). Verily, it is a shameful deed, and an evil way (that leads to other evils)*” which clearly closes all back-doors to deviant human desires, illicit behavior and mixed gatherings.

Women are Happier & More Confident in Separate-Sex Gatherings

Studies have shown that women are happier and more confident when they work in separate-gender settings. The respective behavior of men and women at the workplace could be very different. In order to ease the stress of daily work, men often joke and tease, a habit which many women do not find funny or which may be hurtful to them. This irritates men and they may make comments such as: “You know what her trouble is? She does not have any sense of humor.” However, the reality is that there is no trouble with women, and that they perceive things differently compared to men.

Because their brains think differently, men and women usually do not laugh at the same things. Similarly, different things may offend or disturb women, whereas they may be

acceptable for men.¹⁸⁰ Scientific studies measuring worry and depression among men and women have demonstrated that “anxiety and neuroticism have different correlates in males and females, thus they have different meanings.” In general, women become more worried and anxious compared to men.¹⁸¹ This is because women are more caring, nurturing and emotional in their nature. Therefore, women feel confident and like to work with other women. Men, on the other hand, are less caring, more risk-taking and almost emotionless by their nature. Consequently, men like to work independently.

Another evidence in this regards comes from psychologist Shelley Taylor from University of California, Los Angeles, a specialist in the study of gender differences, noted her observations in one study as follows: “Women maintain more same-sex close relationships than do men, they mobilize more social support in times of stress than do men, they turn to female friends more often, and they report more benefits from contact with their female friends and relatives.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ McGhee, Paul.E. (1979). Humor: Its Origin and Development. San Francisco, W. H. Freeman.

¹⁸¹ Hoyenga, K.B. & Hoyenga, K. (1980). Sex Differences. Boston, Little Brown and Company.

¹⁸² Taylor, Shelley E., et al. (2000). “Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight.” Psychological Review, **107**, 411-429.

Adolescent Girls' Choice of Home as a Safe Haven

Men and women are created as equal but different. In all the past societies, the sphere of men used to be the outside world whereas women used to stay home and take care of the family. Modern secular society, with a joint effort between feminists and media, is trying to drag women out of their homes to spend most of their time in public. Whether for career or sports or simply be the myth of the liberated female, i.e. women liberated from the responsibilities of their homes. However, despite all the efforts of media and capitalists, women by their nature prefer to stay at home.

An interesting study in this regard came from Dr. Kandy James of Edith Cowan University of Australia. In her first study, Dr. James surveyed 10-year old Australian girls and found that those girls rated their bedrooms as the recreational space where they felt least self conscious; the bedroom was the space they most chose to be in.¹⁸³ This triggered Dr. James to carry out an in-depth follow up study on the same girls, now 16 years old. This study explored the reasons for this attitude of the girls towards their bedrooms. Dr. James noted gender difference in this regard that even though boys spend some of their spare time in their bedrooms, it appears that bedrooms are not as important to

¹⁸³ James, Kandy (1998). "Deterrents to active recreation participation: Perceptions of year 10 girls." Health Promotion Journal of Australia 8(3): 183-189.

their identity as they are to girls.¹⁸⁴

The original survey was conducted on 276 adolescent girls. After the data analysis for this experiment, Dr. James discussed the findings of her study by looking at different factors related to girls' responses. One factor was the situational body image, i.e. the impact of an audience and situation on a girl's overall body image at a specific place. When questioned as to the meaning of their bedroom to them, most of the girls mentioned that their bedroom provided them seclusion from potentially critical audiences. Leonie gave a typical response which was shared by many other girls, that her bedroom meant, "Privacy. It's a room where I can go, where I know that people won't be following me and looking at everything I do and watching me."¹⁸⁵

Another notable factor was the fear of ridicule of emotions and the bedroom was a very useful place to hide such public displays of emotion. Many girls revealed this sentiment in the survey, that they used their rooms when they did not want others to watch them being upset.

Among the physical factors studied was the need for having a secure and safe place. Most of the girls chose to spend their time in their rooms because of the secure environment. For instance, Fazia regarded her room as her secure place while Joy said, "It is the one place that I can feel safe". There are other girls in this study who regarded their rooms

¹⁸⁴ James, Kandy (2001). "'I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!': The Bedroom as a Leisure Site for Adolescent Girls." Journal of Leisure Research **32**(1): 71-90.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

as “my haven”, “my refuge” and “my little world.”¹⁸⁶

Another physical factor which contributed towards the emotional attachment of girls to their rooms was the memorabilia in their rooms which provided them with a sense of security. One participant of the study, Kaye, said, “I spend basically all my time at home in my bedroom.... I’m surrounded by all my favorite things... that are *me* basically and that’s the place I like to be” while Fazia said about her memorabilia, “It’s *your* place, where you just feel safest, the most comfortable, with all *your* stuff around.”¹⁸⁷ It seems that women have emotional attachment and memories associated with their homes. Men rarely develop such emotional attachment with their homes (as this study suggests) because they are created to be hunters and gatherers – the breadwinners of their families – who spend most of their time outside the home. For this reason, the girls in the survey also showed a desire to control their own space as noted by Dr. James: “The bedroom was a secure base from which they [girls] could advance and retreat between girlhood and womanhood according to the demands placed on them.”¹⁸⁸

Remember that these were all Western Australian adolescent girls who exercised their free choice and chose their homes and NOT public places as their leisure sites. While discussing the results of this study, Dr. James notes: “Girls were concerned about how their actions might appear to others. They reported enjoying being in their bedrooms because they could ‘be themselves’. This implies that many

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

girls portray a ‘self’ that is not their real self when in public.”¹⁸⁹ This is a deep observation made by Dr. Kandy James. Girls become conscious when non-*mahram* men of the society are watching them and, therefore, they try to portray themselves artificially in public. Islam saves women from this headache. When a woman wears full hijab and burqa and goes out to the public spaces, she does not have to portray herself artificially because no man can enjoy her beauty. A woman in burqa does not have to worry about her body image in public nor does she have to worry about public display of her emotions. Her face as well as her body will be covered. Thus, home provides the security and seclusion which women cherish and enjoy while the burqa provides women with a means of portable seclusion, as Hanna Papanek pointed out in her research on the burqa.

The Blessings of Single-Sex Gatherings – Examples from Muslim Societies

Luce Irigaray laments in her book *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* about our present societies: “Our societies are built upon men-among-themselves (*l’entre-hommes*). According to this order, women remain dispersed and exiled atoms.”¹⁹⁰ In reality, this is human nature. Throughout history, there have always been different spheres for men and women in society. Commenting on the statement of Irigaray, Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad observes:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Irigaray, Luce (1993). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. New York, Cornell University Press.

“Traditionally, the Islamic public space is constructed and subjectivised primarily by ‘*l’entre-hommes*’, the men in white. The women in black signal a kind of absence even when they are present, by assuming a respected guest status. But Islamic society, rooted in primordial and specifically Shari‘atic kinship patterns, emphatically refuses to reduce them to the status of ‘dispersed and exiled atoms’. There is a parallel space of the *entre-femmes*, a realm of alternative meaning and fulfillment, where men are the guests, which intersects in formal ways with the *entre-hommes* but which creates a sociality between women.”¹⁹¹

Indeed, several Western anthropologists have explored the Islamic *entre-femmes*. For instance, Chantal Lobato studied Afghan refugee women during her field work. She severely criticizes the Western stereotypes about separate-sex gatherings of Muslim women and admires the affection and sisterly richness in the lives of those women. She notes in her research that “such women’s spaces, with systems of meaning, tradition, and narrative constructed largely by women themselves, intersect with the male narrative through institutions such as marriage.”¹⁹²

It has been shown elsewhere in this book that the male gaze is a universal phenomenon and, generally, women feel

¹⁹¹ Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) (April 1999). “Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender”. (www.masudkhan.co.uk)

¹⁹² Quoted in: Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) (April 1999). Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender. (www.masudkhan.co.uk)

embarrassed when non-*mahram* men stare at them. It has been observed by many anthropologists that women tend to be very relaxed and enjoy the time with their female companions in all-women gatherings. For example, feminist writer Carla Makhlouf noted the following about a single-sex gathering of the women of Sana'a:

“In a society marked by strict seclusion and rigidly defined sex roles, one would expect to find that the behavior of women is extremely constrained. In fact, one of the most striking features of female society in Yemen is the atmosphere of relaxation which seems to prevail during work and leisure time....

Women have a separate sphere over which men have little control, which may constitute a source of support and even of power.... In fact, for the outsider expecting constrained and repressed female types as a result of seclusion, it is a most agreeable surprise to find that San'ani women do not seem nearly as tense or inhibited as women in some other cultures. Almost always the atmosphere at women's gatherings is pleasant and relaxing.... They are wearing their best clothes, rich velvets and brocades, talking, eating, dancing...”¹⁹³

Veronica Doubleday observed Muslim women in Herat, Afghanistan and she was surprised to see them dressing up, observing fashions, doing makeup, and “showing themselves off to one another”. Doubleday noted that this behavior of Afghani women in all-women gatherings would

¹⁹³ Makhlouf, Carla (1979). Changing Veils: Women and Modernisation in North Yemen. London, Croom Helm.

appear very “strange” to us.¹⁹⁴ She was wondering why Afghani women would dress up when there are only women around and no men to see them? However, that is the whole idea of Islamic hijab: that Muslim women dress up for themselves, their immediate family members, and for their husbands. Muslim women do NOT dress up and display their beauty in public for the sake of male gaze.

All these examples accentuate the point that in a Muslim society, just because women cover in public, or in front of men, does not mean they have no avenues to display themselves and to have fun in life. A Muslim woman enjoys her beauty and femininity in her home, in women’s gatherings and especially with her husband. A Muslim woman’s beauty and femininity is something special. It is not something cheap, for public display.

Men’s Misperceptions of Women’s Interpersonal Behaviors and Sexual Harassment

Islam considers men and women to be equal but different simply because, at the brain level, the two sexes have very different psychologies, emotions and perceptions about each other. Islam forbids free mixing of men and women in the society if it provides the remotest possibility of temptation. Today, psychologists have shown that in mixed gender environments men view male-female interactions as more sexual than women do. Men often mistakenly think of the slightest hint of friendship from women as a sexual

¹⁹⁴ Doubleday, Veronica (1988). Three Women of Herat London: Jonathan Cape, quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

invitation. The Qur'an provides a solution to this problem in the form of separate sex gatherings and, if there is a necessity for unrelated men and women to talk, the Qur'an advises women to talk to men in a straightforward way so that any person in whose heart there is a disease may not misconstrue it as a sexual invitation.

Psychologists have looked at this aspect of the male mentality. Psychologists have also observed that such behaviors are more normative and acceptable in the workplace. For instance, in one study by Frank E. Saal and his associates at the Kansas State University, it was found that men perceive mixed-sex interactions in more sexual terms than do women. In this study, men viewed three different interactions in much more sexual terms than did women: (1) informal "get-acquainted" discussions between a female student and a male student, (2) a male manager training a female cashier, and (3) a male professor discussing an extension of a project with a female student. It was found in the study that men thought the female actor or target was trying to be more seductive, more promiscuous and more flirtatious whereas the women did not think about the female target like men.¹⁹⁵ Hence, compared to women, men are much more likely to misperceive other women's behaviors and intentions.

Similarly, psychologists Catherine B. Johnson, Margaret S. Stockdale and Frank E. Saal conducted another laboratory experiment in which 187 female and 165 male

¹⁹⁵ Saal, Frank E., Johnson, C. B. & Weber, N. (1990). "Friendly or sexy? It may depend on whom you ask." Psychology of Women Quarterly **13**: 263-276.

undergraduate students participated. This study examined whether gender differences in sexually based perceptions of social interactions persist when traditional male-female power roles are reversed. The subjects of the study viewed a 5-minute videotape. Catherine et al. created twelve versions of a scenario depicting a professor interacting with a student of the opposite sex while the gender of the power holder, level of harassment, and response to harassment were changed for different scenarios. The results of this study only confirmed the previous results of men misperceiving women's behavior regardless of the woman's status. They wrote:

“To summarize, this study adds to the generality and robustness of the finding that men are more likely than women to misperceive women's interpersonal behavior. The ratings of men and women differ not only when a female is subordinate in a relationship, but also when she is superior. Furthermore, men's misperceptions of women's behavior persist over increasing levels of harassment with few exceptions. Perhaps most importantly, men's misperceptions persist regardless of whether the student accepts or rejects the professor's advances.”¹⁹⁶

It is very common in mixed-gender environments such as co-education, the workplace and other persistent social interactions that men misread a woman's behavior in that social setting and try to respond to her based on that misperception, only to learn that she had not the slightest

¹⁹⁶ Johnson, Catherine B., Stockdale, Margaret S., Saal, Frank E. (1991). "Persistence of Men's Misperceptions of Friendly Cues across a Variety of Interpersonal Encounters." Psychology of Women Quarterly **15**: 463-475.

interest in pursuing a more intimate personal relationship with that man. Similarly, in free-mixing environments, many women experience such situations when their expressions of interest and friendliness are misconstrued by men as signs of sexual interest or availability. The above study also showed that once men misperceive a woman's behavior, even after the woman clarifies it, they do not want to come out of their imaginary world of misperception.

It is in this context that the Islamic commandment of *hijab* can be easily understood. It is men's psychology that harms women in case of free mixing in society. For this reason, Islam took the approach of nipping the evil in the bud. Islam is aware of this deficiency and defect in men's psychology. Therefore, Islam does not want to give any chance for men to mix freely with unrelated women in the society and then misperceive the behavior of innocent and chaste women.

Hijab and the Islamic Concept of Privacy

If we look at the social structure of Islamic society, a great value is placed on the privacy of its individuals, and on keeping private what should be private. In fact, a concise translation of the Arabic word 'hayaa' is "keeping private what should be private". Islamic injunctions have clearly made a distinction between public and private space and placed a screen (i.e. hijab) between them.¹⁹⁷ Private space is physically divided from public space and clearly protected against any incursion (as stated in Surah An-Noor, ayah 27-29). What people do in private space has also been protected

¹⁹⁷ Al-Muhajabah (n.d.). Why Wear Niqab? www.al-muhajabah.com

and veiled. This is evident by the Islamic commandments strictly prohibiting speculation, gossip and spying (Surah An-Noor, ayah 12-13 and Surah Al-Hujurat, ayah 11-12). Hence, what is private should be kept private, not only by the physical protection of walls but also by the conduct of Muslims in not talking about it, speculating over it, or spying about it. The same concept applies to the physical person, i.e. what is not necessary to be displayed should be covered (as the Qur'an commands in Surah An-Noor ayah 31, women are "not to display their beauty except what is apparent of it"). Moreover, in the private space of the home and family, Islamic rules of modest dress are relaxed. Those people who are within the family may visit freely (Surah An-Noor, ayah 61) and be at ease in dress (Surah An-Noor, ayah 31). On the other hand, in the public sphere, rules are strict. This encompasses not only modest dress but also conduct, e.g. physical contact has to be avoided, there must not be any flirtation in the talk with the opposite sex, khalwa (i.e. an unrelated man and woman being alone together) must be avoided, etc. Hence, in the dress, speech, and behavior of the Muslim, there has to be a screen which separates the public (that which is necessary to be known) and the private (that which is not necessary to be made known)¹⁹⁸. From this, it becomes clear that hijab & niqab are a screen of privacy and an act of hayaa.¹⁹⁹ Islam teaches us to respect the right of privacy of every individual by avoiding unnecessary speculation, gossip, slander, and spying while at the same

¹⁹⁸ If some abuse has occurred in a private space, however, then the victim can and should seek help from the justice system. As the Qur'an says in verse 4:148: "Allah does not like that evil be made public, except where injustice has been done".

¹⁹⁹ Al-Muhajabah (n.d.). Why Wear Niqab? www.al-muhajabah.com

time teaching us to protect our own privacy by taking extra steps in wearing modest Islamic dress. The best manifestation of this is hijab (body-covering) and niqab (face-veil).

From an anthropological perspective as well, niqab is a symbol of privacy and social distance. American anthropologist Robert F. Murphy studied the Tuareg people in Africa. In his research published in the *American Anthropologist*, Murphy noted that the face-veil is a symbol of social distance as well as social prestige and status in a society. In addition, “the veil is connected with privacy and withdrawal.”²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Murphey, Robert F. (Dec., 1964). “Social Distance and the Veil”. *American Anthropologist* **66**(6) Part 1, 1257-1274.

Chapter 8

Hijab with or without Niqab (Face-Veil)? In Light of Islamic Shari'ah

The debate about “hijab with or without niqab” has gained momentum in the current era especially after niqab was forcefully removed from the faces of Muslim women by the colonial masters. Before that, niqab was always considered an integral part of hijab. Furthermore, in the modern era, the face of a woman is the most important marketing and advertisement tool in the media industry. The whole advertisement-media-industry complex in the Muslim countries would crumble to dust if they accepted the Islamic injunction that Muslim women cover their faces in front of any non-*mahram* men (this term refers to all those males whom a woman is permitted to marry). Today, there is widespread misunderstanding and confusion among the Muslims regarding the dress of Muslim women. One of the purposes of writing this book is to put a seal on the debate of “hijab with or without niqab” in Islam.

In order to approach this issue, first, we will look at the evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah regarding the issue of hijab with or without niqab. Next, we will look at the verdicts of the Prophetic companions (*sahabah*) as to how

they understood the commandments of the Qur'an. We will also look at the position of Islamic scholars on this issue. Before we begin the discussion, it is important for us to understand that the ultimate authority for the Muslims is the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In Qur'an, Allah the Most Exalted One, says:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا﴾ (36)

“It is not for the believing man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in a plain error.” (Surah Al-Ahzab: 36)

In Surah An-Noor, Allah says:

﴿فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾ (63)

“And let those who oppose the Messenger's commandment beware, lest some affliction befall them or a painful torment be inflicted upon them.”
(Surah An-Noor: Ayah 63)

The above-mentioned verses of the Qur'an tell us that we should follow the commandments of Allah and His Messenger. We should not allow search for loopholes in those commandments by propounding our opinions or by rationalizing our judgments just because we are not used to

seeing those commandments as the norm in society. When we look around us, we see Muslim women with uncovered faces (with only head-scarves) walking on the streets, shopping in the markets and being the center of the media's attention. However, the fact that majority of Muslim women do not wear niqab is not a justification to make this practice permissible because the Qur'an tells us in one instance:

﴿وَإِنْ تُطِيعَ أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ﴾^(١١٦)

"If you follow the MAJORITY of people on Earth, they will lead you astray. That is because they follow conjecture and fail to think"

(Surah Al-An'am: 116)

The word "hijab" comes from the Arabic word "hajaba" meaning "to hide from view or conceal, to cover, screen, shelter, seclude (from), to hide, obscure (from sight), to make imperceptible, invisible, to disguise, masked, to flee from sight, to veil, conceal, to cover up, become hidden". In the context of Islamic teachings, hijab refers to the modest covering of a Muslim woman. The questions now are: "What is the extent of the covering?" "Does hijab include "niqab" (face-veil) or not?" For answers to these questions, we have to look at the evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah (the teaching and practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)) and the position taken by the companions (i.e., *sahabah*).

Qur'anic Position Regarding Hijab with Niqab (Face-Covering)

First Ayah from the Qur'an

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَبِيبِهِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا﴾

'O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks ("Jalabib" or veils) over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known (as such) and not molested: and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (Surah al-Ahzab: 59)

There are two Arabic words in this ayah which need explanation: *Jilbaab* and *Adnaa*. Regarding the Arabic word *Jilbaab*, Ibn Kathir writes:

والجلباب هو الرداء فوق الخمار قاله ابن مسعود وعبيدة والحسن البصري وسعيد بن جبير وإبراهيم النخعي وعطاء الخراساني وغير واحد.

“*Jilbaab* refers to that cloak which is worn above the *khimar*. Abdullah bin Mas'ud, Obaida, Hasan Basari, Saeed bin Jubayr, Ibrahim An-Nakhi', Ataa Kharasani, all of them considered this as the meaning of *jilbaab*”.²⁰¹

Commentator of the Qur'an, Imam Al-Qurtubee said: “The word *jalabeeb* is the plural of *jilbaab* and that is a garment

²⁰¹ Ibn Kathir, Haafiz Imad ud din Abul Fida (died 774 A.H. / 1373 C.E.) (2004). Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Lahore, Darul Isha'at Publishers. (Urdu translation) Vol. 2.

that is bigger than a khimar. The correct view is that it is a cloth that covers the entire body.”²⁰²

A well-known commentator of the Qur'an, Al-Alusi said: “The garment should be wrapped from the top, covering the forehead, then bringing one side of the sheet to cover the face below the eyes, so that most of the face and the upper body is covered. This will leave both eyes uncovered.”²⁰³

The famous Arabic grammarian, Ibn Manzoor said: “The *jilbaab* is an outer garment or covering, which a woman wraps around her self over her (inner) garments so that she may be covered from head to toe. It conceals her body completely.”²⁰⁴

Regarding the second word “*adnaa*”, when it is mentioned as “*adnaa jilbaab*”, all the commentators of the Qur'an who are experts in Arabic language agree that it means “to cover the face”. *Adnaa* is to draw close and wrap up, but when this word is used with the associating particle *ala*, it gives the meaning of letting something down from above.²⁰⁵ Some modernist Islamic scholars or translators, being influenced by the Western culture, have translated this word

²⁰² Al-Qurtubee, Mohammad bin Ahmed bin Abu Bakr (died 671 A.H./ 1273 C.E.) (1405 A.H.) Al-Jaami' Li-Ahkaam-al-Qur'an: Dar Ihya At-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut. vol. 7, pg. 243-244.

²⁰³ Alusi, Mahmud ibn 'Abd Allah (died 1270 A.H./ 1854 C.E.) (1983). Ruh al-ma'ani fi tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim wa-al-sab' al-mathani. Beirut, Dar al-Fikr: vol. 22, pg. 89.

²⁰⁴ Ibn Manzoor, Allama (Al-Afriki) (died 711 A.H./ 1311 C.E.) (1304 A.H.). Lisaanul Arab. Bulaaq (Egypt), Mat'baa Al-Muneeria: vol.1, pg. 273.

²⁰⁵ Maududi, Syed Abul A'la (died 1979 C.E.) (1995) The Meaning of the Qur'an. (English translation of *Tafseer Tafsheemul Qur'an*) Lahore, Islamic Publications. Volume 4, pp. 142-144, section on: Tafseer of Surah Al-Ahzab.

"to wrap up" so as to avoid somehow the Command about covering of the face. But if Allah had meant what those modernists want to construe, He would have said: *yudnina ilai-hinna* and not *yudnina alai-hinna*. *Yudnina 'alai-hinna* does not merely mean "wrapping up". Furthermore, the words *min jalabib-e-hinna* also do not leave any room for the meanings intended by modernists. It is obvious that the preposition *min* here indicates a part of the sheet, and also that wrapping up is done by means of a whole sheet and not merely by a part of it. The verse, therefore, clearly means: The women should wrap themselves up well in their sheets, and should draw and let down a part of the sheet in front of the face.²⁰⁶ Ibn Kathir provides a commentary of this verse from Ibn Abbas, cousin and companion of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and an expert in the commentary of the Qur'an:

أمر الله نساء المؤمنين إذا خرجن من بيوتهن في حاجة أن يغطين وجوههن من فوق رؤوسهن بالجلابيب ويبدين عينا واحدة-

“Allah commanded the believing women that when they come out of their homes for a necessity, they cover their faces from over their heads, with *jalabeeb*, and that they expose (only) one eye.”^{207,208}

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Vol. 4, pp. 144.

²⁰⁷ Ibn Kathir, Hafiz Imad ud din Abul Fida. Tafseer Ibn Kathir. Vol.2, pg. 298.

²⁰⁸ Ibn Hajar has regarded this saying of Ibn Abbas as *hasan* (good) in its chain. One of the narrators of this statement of Ibn Abbas is Ali bin Abu Talha and according to some scholars, Ali bin Abu Talha did not hear it directly from Ibn Abbas. However, Ibn Hajar mentions in his *Fath ul Baari* that according to him as well as many other scholars, the link between Ali bin Abu Talha and Ibn Abbas is Mujahid bin Jabar and Sa'eed bin Jubayr, both of whom were the most reliable of the students of Ibn Abbas. Ibn Hajar further notes: "Sayings of Ibn Abbas about the tafseer of Qur'an narrated by Ali bin Abu Talha were

It has been narrated by Imam Baghawi in *Tafseer al-Baghawi* in the commentary of this ayah:

قال ابن عباس وأبو عبيدة: أمر نساء المؤمنين أن يغطين رؤوسهن ووجوههن بالجلابيب إلا عيناً واحدة.

“Ibn Abbas and Obaida have said Allah has commanded Muslim women that they cover their heads and faces except one eye.”²⁰⁹

In fact, all the great commentators who have passed after the period of the Companions and their immediate followers have given the same meaning of this verse. Ibn Jarir Tabari, in his commentary of this verse, says: "Respectable women should not look like slave-girls in the way they dress when they move out of their houses, with uncovered faces and loose hair; they should, rather, draw and let down over them a part of their sheets or outer-garments so that no evil person may dare molest them."²¹⁰

recorded in a *saheefa* (treatise). Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim have relied on this *saheefa* when doing tafseer of the Qur'an and Imam Ahmed has highly praised this *saheefa* of the tafseer Ibn Abbas by Abu Talha as noted in al-Fath ar-Rabbani: 'Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal said that in Egypt there is a *saheefa* about the tafseer of Qur'an by Ibn Abbas narrated by Ali bin Abu Talha and if a man travels to Egypt only for the sake of this saheefa then it is worth it. And a copy of this saheefa can be found with Abu Saalih who is the scribe for Imam Laith bin Saad and this *saheefa* is narrated from Mua'wiya bin Saalih who narrates it from Ali bin Abu Talha who narrates it from Ibn Abbas." (Fath ul-Bari, vol. 8, pp. 438-439)

²⁰⁹ Baghawi, Abu Muhammad al-Hussain. (died 516 A.H./ 1122 C.E.) (1993) Tafseer al-Baghawi. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, vol. 5, p. 160.

²¹⁰ Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir. (died 310 A.H./ 923 C.E.) (1992) Jaami Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil ayi'l Qur'an. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, vol. 12, p. 33.

Similarly, the following commentary of “*adnaa jilbaab*” is provided in *Tafseer Kashaaf*:

يَرخينها عليهن ويغطين بها وجوههن

“They draw their cloaks over their bodies and cover their faces.”²¹¹

Abu Bakr Al-Jassas Al-Hanafee said: “In this ayah is evidence that a young woman is commanded with:

- (1) covering her face in front of non-*mahram* men
- (2) remaining covered, and
- (3) refraining from going out (without it) so that the people will not place any doubt upon her.”²¹²

Imam Razi says: "What is meant in this ayah is that the people may know that they are not promiscuous women. For the woman who covers her face, though the face is not included in the '*awrah*' (that which needs to be covered) cannot be expected to uncover her '*awrah*', which is obligatory to cover before the other man. Thus, everyone will know that they are modest and virtuous women who cannot be expected to do anything indecent.”²¹³

Second Ayah from the Qur'an

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ

²¹¹ Az-Zamakhshari, Abul Qasim. (died 538 A.H./ 1144 C.E.) (2006) *Tafseer al-Kashaaf*. Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, vol. 2.

²¹² al-Jassas al-Razi, Abu Bakr (died 370 A.H./ 980 C.E.) (1347 A.H.) *Ahkaam-ul-Qur'an*, Egypt, Mat'baa al-Bahia, vol. 3, pg. 371-372.

²¹³ Razi, Imam Fakhruddin. (died 606 A.H./ 1209 C.E.) (2000) *At-Tafseer-ul-Kabeer*. Beirut, Darul Kutubul Ilmiyyah, vol. 4.

فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ
 بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ
 آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ
 إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا
 مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ
 أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا
 يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ
 اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

'And Say to the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts)²¹⁴ and not to show off their zeenah (adornment) except only that which is apparent from it. And (tell them) to draw their khimaars (veils) all over bosoms (chest/breast) (Juyubihinna). And (tell them) not to reveal their zeenah (adornment) except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex. And let them not stamp

²¹⁴ The readers must note that the verse previous to this one, that is, 24:30, orders men to likewise lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts). Islam is balanced in its dealing with both genders and does not put the entire burden of chastity upon women.

their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful. (Surah An-Noor: 31)

The word “khumur” used in this ayah is the plural of “khimaar” and it is used to cover the head and the face. Imam Ibn Khuzaimah said in his Saheeh: “The *khimaar* refers to the cloth with which a woman covers her face with.”²¹⁵

Someone may argue that *khimaar* is primarily used to cover the hair/neck/chest and it is not primarily the face-covering. Yes, in terms of its linguistic meaning, it may be true but we can see in the books of hadeeth that women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used *khimaar* for the purpose of covering their faces, even if it involved simply pulling up their hair-covering to cover their face.

In the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, women used to wear a sort of hair covering, which was tied in a knot at the rear of the head. The slit of the shirt in the front partly remained open exposing the front of the neck and the upper part of the bosom. There was nothing except the shirt to cover the breasts, and the hair was worn in two of plaits hanging behind like tails.²¹⁶ The way the Muslim women responded to this Command has been described by Ayesha, the mother of the believers. She said:

“May Allah have mercy on the first Emigrant women (*Muhaajiroon*). When Allah revealed: **‘And (tell them) to draw their *khimaars* over**

²¹⁵ Ibn Khuzaimah, Imam Muhammad bin Ishaq. (died 311 A.H./ 923 C.E.) Saheeh Ibn Khuzaimah: Beirut, Al-Maktab al-Islami. vol. 4.

²¹⁶ Ibn Kathir, Hafiz Imad ud din Abul Fida. Tafseer Ibn Kathir. Vol.2.

their bosoms (*juyoob*), they tore off their aprons or waistsheets (*izars*) and used them as *khimaars*.
 „217

Hafiz Ibn Hajar said in explanation of this hadeeth:

فاختمرن ای غطین وجوههن .

“Her saying ‘**used them as khimaars**’ means they covered their faces with them.²¹⁸ The manner of doing this is by placing the khimaar over the head and then letting it fling from the right side to the left shoulder. This is known as *taqannu*’ (enwrapping). In the Days of Ignorance, the women would let the *khimaar* hang from (the top of her head down) behind her, and so she would expose what was in front of it (i.e. the face and neck). That’s why she was commanded to veil.”²¹⁹

Commenting on the above hadeeth of Ayesha, Imam Muhammad Al-Ameen Ash-Shanqiti wrote in *Adwaa-ul-Bayaan*, his commentary of the Qur’an:

“This authentic hadeeth is a clear proof that the female Companions mentioned in it understood that the meaning of Allah’s saying: ‘**And (tell them) to draw their khimaars all over their juyoob**’ necessitated the veiling of their faces. That is why they tore off part of their dresses and ‘used them as khimaars’ which means that they covered their faces with them, obeying Allah’s

²¹⁷ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book of Tafseer of the Qur’an (vol. 6, no. 282)

²¹⁸ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Ali (2010) Fath ul Baari.
 Lahore, Al-Maktaba as-Salafiyya. vol. 8, pg. 490.

²¹⁹ Taken from the book ‘Awdat-ul-Hijab (3/287-288). Quoted in: Bin Baaz, Al-Uthaimeen, Al-Fawzaan & Al-Madkhalee. (2006) Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling. Alarcon, Abu Maryam Isma’eel (ed.). New York, Al-Ibanah.

command in (24:31), which mandates the veiling of their faces.

It is well known that they could not have gotten their understanding that Allah's saying: '**And (tell them) to draw their khimaars all over their juyooob**' meant to veil the face except from the Prophet (peace be upon him) since he was present at that time. They would ask him about things that they found difficulty with in their religion. Allah says: 'And We revealed to you the Reminder (Sunnah) so that you can explain to the people what was revealed to them.' (Surah An-Nahl: 44) So it is not possible that they could come up with an understanding of this *ayah* by themselves."²²⁰

Another narration in the books of ahadeeth which further proves that Muslim women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used *khimaar* for the purpose of covering their faces is the one narrated by Fatima bint al-Mundhir who said:

عن فاطمة بنت المنذر انها قالت: كُنَّا نَخْمِرُ وُجُوهَنَا وَنَحْنُ
مُحْرِمَاتٌ وَنَحْنُ مَعَ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ.

(مؤطا امام مالك، كتاب الحج، باب وانما يعمل الرجل

مادام حيا فاذا مات فقد القضي)

"We used to veil our faces with *khimaar* when we were in *Ihram* in the company of Asmaa bint Abu Bakr As-Siddiq."²²¹

²²⁰ Ash-Shanqiti, Muhammad Al-Ameen (died 1393 A.H./ 1973 C.E.) (1426 A.H.) Tafseer 'Awdaa-ul-Bayaan. Makkah, Dar 'Alam al-Fawaaid. Vol. 6, pg. 595.

²²¹ Imam Malik Muwatta, Book on Hajj (Book 20, hadeeth # 20.5.16)

Similarly, Sheikh Albaani in his book Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah admits that sometimes *khimaar* is used to cover the face. While quoting the following piece of poetry, Sheikh Albaan wrote:

”قل للمليحة في الخمار المذهب
افسدت نسك اخي التقى المذهب
نور الخمار ونور خدك تحته
عجبا لوجهك كيف لم يتهلّب
فقد وصفها بان خمارها كان على وجهها ايضاً“

(حجاب المرأة المسلمة، علامه الباني)

“You should tell Meliha [name of the woman whom the poet fell in love with] that you have destroyed the piety and holiness of my brother because of your golden-colored *khimaar*. There is radiance of your *khimaar* and then there is also radiance of your cheeks beneath the *khimaar*. I am surprised at your face that (in spite of so much luminosity) why is it still not blazing?”²²²

After quoting this piece of poetry, Sheikh Albaani continues: “The poet has mentioned the attribute of his beloved that *khimaar* (cloak) was on her face.”²²³

The point to note here is that the Arab poet is talking about the face under the *khimaar*: “نور الخمار ونور خدك تحته” (radiance of your *khimaar* and then there is also radiance of

²²² Albaani, Sheikh Nasir ud Din (1996) Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah. Lahore, al-Maktabah al-Islaamiyyah.

²²³ Ibid.

your cheeks beneath the *khimaar*.)

Third Ayah from the Qur'an

﴿وَالْقَوَاعِدُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ الَّتِي لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجَاتٍ بِزِينَةٍ وَأَنْ يَسْتَعْفِفْنَ خَيْرٌ لَهُنَّ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

“And as for women past child-bearing who do not expect wed-lock, it is no sin on them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show their adornment. But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower.”
(Surah An-Noor: 60)

In this verse of the Qur'an, permission has been granted to them that if they remove their outer garments (and their face becomes uncovered), there is no sin for them as long as those women are past child-bearing age and they are no longer sexually attractive to men. The second condition is that those women cannot exploit this permission by putting on adornment such as make-up, etc. If they want to come bare-faced in front of non-*mahram* men, they are permitted to do so without any makeup.

In this verse, the word “*thiyaab*” means outer clothing such as loose cloaks, face-veil, gowns, etc. All the commentators of the Qur'an have adopted the translation of “*thiyaab*” to mean “loose cloaks”. Imam Tabari writes in explanation of this verse:

فليس عليهن حرج ولا اثم ان يضعن ثيابهن يعنى جلابيهن
وهى القناع الذى يكون فوق الخمار والرداء الذى يكون
فوق الثياب لا حرج عليهن ان يضعن ذلك عند المحارم
من الرجال وغير المحارم من الغرباء غير متبرجات بزينة.

“There is no sin upon these (old) women if they remove their (*thiyaab*), meaning their “*jilbaab*”, which is the face covering (*qinaa`*) which is worn over the *khimaar*, and also the cloak (*ridaa`*) which is worn above the clothes (*thiyaab*). There is no sin for such women if they remove this in front of related and non-related males, as long as those women do not show their adornment.”²²⁴

Similarly, Imam Baghawi states in the commentary of this verse of Surah an-Noor:

يعنى يضعن بعض ثيابهن وهى الجلباب والرداء الذى فوق الثوب
والقناع الذى فوق الخمار فأما الخمار فلا يجوز وضعه.

“It means that they discard some of their outer clothing and that refers to that cloak and outer covering which is worn above the clothes or the niqab which is worn above the head covering. As far as the head covering is concerned, it is not allowed to be removed (in front of non-*mahram* men).”²²⁵

Although this verse of Surah an-Noor is addressing old women, there is evidence for the face-covering of young women in this verse. Islamic scholar Hafiz Mohammad

²²⁴ Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir. (1992) Jaami Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil ayi'l Qur'an. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, vol. 9, p. 348.

²²⁵ Baghawi, Abu Muhammad al-Hussain. (1993) Tafseer al-Baghawi. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, vol. 4, p. 449.

Zubair comments on this ayah as follows:

“In this ayah ‘al-qawaa’id’ or old women have been given the permission not to observe hijab and the opposite meaning (*mafhoom mukhaalif*) of this injunction is that those women who are not past the age of childbearing and who are young, if they do not cover their faces in front of non-*mahram* men then they will be committing a sin. The wordings of the verse “*fa laisaa alayhinna junahun*” (that there is no sin on those old women) is alluding to the fact that there are other women on whom there is a sin and those are the women who are not old but they are young. To bring the evidence in this way is known as *mafhoom mukhaalif* among the jurists.”²²⁶

Evidence from the Prophetic Sayings Regarding Hijab with Niqab (Face-Covering)

The following are a few of the ahadeeth (Prophet’s sayings) which are either *saheeh* (authentic) or *hasan* (good) in terms of their authenticity and the chain of narrators:

Hadeeth # 1

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: كُنَّ نِسَاءُ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
يَشْهَدْنَ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ صَلَاةَ الْفَجْرِ مُتَلَفَعَاتٍ بِمِرْوَطِهِنَّ
ثُمَّ يَنْقَلِبْنَ إِلَى بُيُوتِهِنَّ حِينَ يَقْضِينَ الصَّلَاةَ لَا يَعْرِفُهُنَّ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ
الْغَلَسِ. (صحيح البخاري، كتاب مواقيت الصلاة، باب وقت الفجر)

²²⁶ Zubair, Hafiz Mohammad (2010) Face-veil: Obligatory, Recommended or Innovation? (in Urdu) Lahore, Maktaba Rahmatul Lil Alamin.

“Ayesha (the mother of believers) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) used to offer the Fajr prayer and some believing women covered with their veiling sheets (mutalaffi`aati bi muroot@ihinna) used to attend the Fajr prayer with him and then they would return to their homes unrecognized from the darkness of night.”

227

If we look at the specific wordings of this hadeeth “لَا يَعْرِفُهُنَّ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ” “(they were) unrecognized them due to darkness of night”, Islamic scholars have shed light on the meanings of those wordings:

Haafiz Ibn Hajar writes while explaining this hadeeth:

قال الداودى : معناه لا يعرفن أ نساء ام رجال أى لا يظهر للرأى الا الاشباح خاصة -

“Dawoodi said that these words mean that due to darkness, it was hard for any viewer to recognize if they were women or men; they would just appear as human shapes.”²²⁸

Imam Nawawi has also given preference to this meaning. He states:

(ما يعرفن من الغلس) هو بقايا ظلام الليل، قال الداودى معناه ما يعرفن أ نساء هن أم رجال، وقيل ما يعرف اعيانهن وهذا ضعيف لأن المتلفعة فى النهار ايضاً لا يعرف عينها فلا يبقى فى الكلام فائدة -

²²⁷ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book on Timings of Prayers, Chapter: Time of Fajr prayers

²²⁸ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath ul Baari, Book on Timings of the Prayers, Chapter: Time of Fajr Prayers

“*Al-ghalas* means the darkness of the night which still remains (before dawn). Dawuudi says that it means that it was difficult for the viewer to recognize if they were women or men. And there is another explanation according to which ‘those women’s identity was not recognized’ and this is a weak (argument) because a woman’s identity is unrecognizable even in the day time if she is *mutalaffi`ah* (wrapped up in a veiling sheet), so there is no use (in this latter explanation).”²²⁹

Sheikh Ibn Uthaimen in tafseer of this hadeeth explains:

"This hadeeth makes it clear that the Islamic dress is concealing of the entire body as explained in this hadeeth. Only with the complete cover including the face and hands can a woman not be recognized. This was the understanding and practice of the Sahabah and they were the best of group, the noblest in the sight of Allah with the most complete Imaan and noblest of characters. So if the practice of the women of the sahabah was to wear the complete veil then how can we deviate from their path?"²³⁰

²²⁹ Sahih Muslim. The Book of Masajid and places of prayers, Chapter on recommendation of saying takbeer in the early morning.

²³⁰ Ibn Uthaimen, Mohammad, Hijab: In Light of Qur'an and Sunnah (1408 Hijra) Riyadh, Maktab A-Ta'awun li dawah wal Irshad.

Hadeeth # 2

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مَسْلَمَةَ قَالَ: خَطَبْتُ امْرَأَةً فَجَعَلْتُ اتَّخَبًا لَهَا
حَتَّى نَظَرْتُ إِلَيْهَا فِي نَحْلِ لَهَا فَقِيلَ لَهُ: اتَّفَعُلْ هَذَا وَأَنْتَ
صَاحِبُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ؟ فَقَالَ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ
يَقُولُ: ((إِذَا أَلْقَى اللَّهُ فِي قَلْبِ امْرِئٍ خِطْبَةَ امْرَأَةٍ فَلَا بَأْسَ
أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا))

(سنن ابن ماجه، كتاب النكاح، باب النظر الى المرأة اذا اراد ان يتزوجها)

“Muhammad bin Maslamah narrates that he had sent a marriage proposal to a woman and he would try to see her secretly until one day when the woman went to her garden, he was able to see her (while she was unaware of it). People said to me: ‘You are the companion of the Messenger of Allah and still you are doing this?’ Hence, I told them that I have heard from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him): ‘When a man intends to marry a woman then there is no sin on him if he looks at her.’”²³¹

A similar tradition has also been reported in Musnad Ahmed. Abu Hameed reported that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

إِذَا خَطَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ امْرَأَةً فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا إِذَا كَانَ
إِنَّمَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا لِخِطْبَةٍ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَا تَعْلَمُ.

(مسند احمد عن ابو حميد)

²³¹ Sunan Ibn Majah, Book on Marriage, Chapter: Looking at a woman who one intends to marry. This narration is *saheeh* (authentic) and Sheikh Albaani has also classified it as *saheeh*.

“When one of you (believer) intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, so long as his looking at her is only for the purpose of the intention of marriage. And this is even if she is unaware of it.”²³²

In the hadeeth of Muhammad bin Maslamah, the phrase *‘قَالَ بَأْسَ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا’* (there is no sin in looking at her) is a definitive basis of proof, in that the Prophet (peace be upon him) excluded sin from the suitor (khaatib), particularly when looking at his intended spouse, with the condition that his look at her be for the purpose of marriage. This demonstrates that anyone other than the man intending marriage is sinning when he looks at non-mahram women, under every condition. Furthermore, Muhammad bin Maslamah had to struggle hard to see her which in itself provides evidence that in those blessed times, women used to cover their faces. If that woman had not been covering her face when going out, then there would have been no need for Ibn Maslamah to secretly see her.

Hadeeth # 3

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: أَوْ مِتِ امْرَأَةً مِنْ وَرَاءِ
 سِتْرِ بَيْدِهَا كَتَابَ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ فَقَبَضَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ
 يَدَهُ فَقَالَ: مَا أَدْرِي أَيُّدُ رَجُلٍ أَمْ يَدُ امْرَأَةٍ؟ قَالَتْ: بَلِ امْرَأَةٌ
 قَالَ: ((لَوْ كُنْتُ امْرَأَةً لَغَيَّرْتُ أَظْفَارَكَ يَعْنِي بِالْحِنَاءِ))
 (سنن أبي داود، كتاب الرجل، باب في الخضاب للنساء)

²³² It is mentioned in the book *Majma-uz-Zawaaid* that all the narrators of its chain are narrators of the *Saheeh* criteria. Sheikh Al-Albaani authenticated it in his *as-Saheehah* (no. 97) where he said: “Its chain of narration is authentic. Its narrators are all reliable, according to the standard of Imam Muslim.”

“Ayesha (the mother of the believers) narrates that on one occasion a woman made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him). The Prophet (peace be upon him) closed his hand, saying: I do not know this is a man's or a woman's hand. She said: No, a woman. He said: If you were a woman, you would make a difference to your nails, meaning (to colour them) with henna.”²³³

In this hadeeth, the fact that the woman gave the letter to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from behind the veil bears testimony to the fact that women used to go to the Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) and talked to him from behind the curtain.

Hadeeth # 4

لَا تُبَاشِرُ الْمَرْأَةُ الْمَرْأَةَ فَتَنْتَعَهَا لِزَوْجِهَا كَأَنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا

(صحيح البخارى، كتاب النكاح، باب لا تبشر المرأة المرأة فتنتعها لزوجها)

“A woman should not look at or meet another woman and later describe her to her husband in such a way as if he was actually looking at her.”²³⁴

The phrase كَأَنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا in this hadeeth is yet another proof that women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to wear niqab. Otherwise, if women were going out in front of non-mahram men with faces

²³³ Sunan Abu Dawud, Book on Combing the Hair, Chapter: Use of Dyes by women (Book 33, No. 4154). This narration is *hasan* (good in its chain) and Sheikh Albaani has also classified it as *hasan*.

²³⁴ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book on Marriage, Chapter: A woman should not meet another woman and then describe her to her husband. (Chap. 33, Hadeeth 1869)

uncovered then men would not have any need for their wives to describe the beauty of other women to them but men would have been able to see the faces of those women themselves.

Hadeeth # 5

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَسْعُودٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: ((الْمَرْأَةُ عَوْرَةٌ فَإِذَا خَرَجَتْ اسْتَشَرَ فِيهَا الشَّيْطَانُ))

(سنن الترمذی، کتاب الرضاع، باب ما جاع فی کراهیة الدخول علی

المغیبات و رواه ابن حبان فی صحیحہ والطبرانی فی الکبیر)

“All of a woman is *awrah*. When she leaves her home, Satan looks at her.”²³⁵

While explaining the meaning of *awrah*, the author of *Majma Al-Bayan* has commented on this Hadeeth as follows:

“*Awrah* refers to anything which can be easily harmed just like a bare or exposed place. Therefore it becomes clear that the body of a woman is referred to as vulnerable because it is like a house which contains

²³⁵ Tirmidhi, Imam Abu Esa (1988) *Sunan At-Tirmidhi* Lahore, Zia ul Ihsan Publishers. Chapter: Use of Dyes by women (Book 33, No. 4154). This narration is *hasan* (good in its chain) and Sheikh Albaani has classified it as *saheeh*. This hadeeth is also narrated by Ibn Habbab in his *Saheeh Ibn Habbab* and in Tabaraani in his *Al-Kabeer*. In explaining this hadeeth, Sheikh Salih Al-Munajjid stated that this hadeeth narrated by Tirmidhi has an authentic chain (*saheeh*) and there is a clear commandment in this hadeeth that a woman must cover everything including her face in front of unrelated (*non-mahram*) men. (*Hijab: In Light of Qur'an and Sunnah*, Riyadh)

no walls and can be easily harmed and must be covered with the appropriate clothing.”²³⁶

Hadeeth # 6

إِنْ كَانَ لِأَحَدَاكُنَّ مَكَاتَبٌ فَكَانَ عِنْدَهُ مَا يُؤَدِّي فَلْتَحْتَجِبْ مِنْهُ

(سنن ابی داؤد، کتاب العتق، باب فی المکاتب یؤدی بعض کاتبه فیعجز او یموت)

*“When you (women) have a slave, who has enough money to make a contract of emancipation with you (in return for a payment) (mukatabah) then that woman must now cover herself in front of him.”*²³⁷

This hadeeth tells us that a woman may leave her face uncovered in front of her slave. However, this permission is only as long as he is her slave. As soon as he gains his freedom, he becomes a non-mahram man for the woman and she has to observe hijab in front of him.

²³⁶ al-Tabrisi, al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan (died in 548 A.H./ 1153 C.E.) Majma Al Bayaan (1977) Commentary upon the Qur’an, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf & Sons, 33:14, #2312.

²³⁷ Sunan Abu Dawud, Book of Emancipation of slaves (Kitab al-‘Itaq), Chapter: a slave who has entered into an agreement to purchase his freedom (mukatab) and made a part payment, but finally he is unable to complete the amount or dies. Imam Abu Dawud has quoted this hadeeth in his *Sunan Abu Dawud* (hadeeth # 3928) and he remained silent about it which implies that this hadeeth is authentic This is so because Imam Abu Dawud clarified in his *Risalatuhu le Ahl al-Makkah* (Letter of to the People of Makkah): “And any hadith in my book that contains a severe weakness, then I have explained it, and from it is that which does not have an authentic isnad (chain). And whatever I did not mention anything about (remained silent), then it is *salih* (authentic).”

Hadeeth # 7

أَتَيْتُ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ فَذَكَرْتُ لَهُ امْرَأَةً أَخْطَبْتُهَا فَقَالَ : ((إِذْهَبِ
فَانْظُرِي إِلَيْهَا فَإِنَّهُ أَجْدَرُ أَنْ يُودَمَ بَيْنَكُمَا)) فَاتَيْتُ امْرَأَةً مِنْ
الْأَنْصَارِ فَخَطَبْتُهَا إِلَى أَبَوَيْهَا وَأَخْبَرْتُهُمَا بِقَوْلِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ
فَكَانَتْهُمَا كَرِهَا ذَلِكَ، قَالَ فَسَمِعْتُ ذَلِكَ الْمَرْأَةَ وَهِيَ فِي
خِدْرِهَا فَقَالَتْ : إِنْ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ أَمَرَكَ أَنْ تَنْظُرَ
فَانْظُرِي وَإِلَّا فَانْشُدْكَ كَانَتْهَا أَعْظَمْتُ ذَلِكَ قَالَ فَظَرْتُ
إِلَيْهَا فَتَزَوَّجْتُهَا))

(سنن ابن ماجه، كتاب النكاح، باب النظر الى المرأة اذا اراد ان يتزوجها)

Mugheera bin Shuba narrates: “I came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him about a woman who I was intending to marry. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told me: “You should go and look at her first, for it is the best means of establishing love between the two of you.” Hence, I went to visit her when she was with her parents. And while she was in her room (*fi khidriha*), I told her parents my intention to marry her and told them about the Prophet’s saying (to me that I should look at her). The girl’s parents did not seem at ease with this. The girl overheard my conversation with her parents and she was standing behind the curtain. She said to me from behind the curtain that if Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) ordered you to see me then do so and if that is not the case then I swear by Allah that do not do this to me. Thus, that woman gave a high regard to the command of the Allah’s Messenger

(peace be upon him). I looked at her and then I married her.”²³⁸

Again, this hadeeth provides evidence that women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to cover their faces in front of unrelated men.

Hadeeth # 8

عَنْ أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ كَانَ الرُّكْبَانُ
يَمُرُّونَ بِنَا وَنَحْنُ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ مُحْرِمَاتٌ فَإِذَا حَادُّوا
بِنَا سَدَلَتْ إِحْدَانَا جِلْبَابَهَا مِنْ رَأْسِهَا عَلَى وَجْهِهَا فَإِذَا
جَاوَزُونَا كَشَفْنَاهُ.

(سنن ابى داؤد، كتاب المناسك، باب فى المحرمة تغطى وجهها)

Narrated by Ummul Mu'minin Ayesha (the mother of believers): "*She said that the riders would pass us while we were with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) in "ihraam". When they got close to us, we would draw our outer cloak (jilbaab) from our heads over our faces. When they passed by, we would uncover our faces.*"²³⁹

²³⁸ Sunan Ibn Majah, Book on Marriage, Chapter: Looking at a woman who one intends to marry. This narration is *saheeh* (authentic) and Sheikh Albaani has also classified it as *saheeh*.

²³⁹ Sunan Abu Dawud, Book on Rituals, Chapter: About women wearing the Ihraam covering their faces (Book 33, No. 4154). This narration is *hasan* in its authenticity. Sheikh Al-Albaani has also classified this narration as *hasan* in his book *Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah* (pg. 58) stating that it is *hasan* due to corroborating evidence.

In this hadeeth, Ayesha (the mother of believers) is saying that she and other women accompanying the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the trip to Hajj would cover their faces when the riders of the caravan got close to them. This hadeeth is not specific for the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) only. Instead, the commandment of this hadeeth is general and for all the women as it will be shown in the next hadeeth.

Hadeeth # 9

عَنْ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: كُنَّا نُعْطِي
وُجُوهَنَا مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَكُنَّا نَمْتَشِطُ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْإِحْرَامِ.

(المستدرک علی الصحیحین، امام حاکم، جلد ۱، ص ۴۵۴)

Asmaa bint Abu Bakr narrates: “We used to veil our faces from men (non-mahram) and we would also comb our hair in the state of Ihram.”²⁴⁰

Asmaa bint Abu Bakr was the sister of Ayesha, the mother of believers and from amongst the female companions. She was not from amongst the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Asmaa has mentioned in this hadeeth that she as well as other female companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to veil their faces in front of non-mahram men which is a definitive proof that the commandment of covering the face was not just for the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) but for all Muslim women.

²⁴⁰ Imam Hakim. Al-Mustadrak ala Saheehain. Hyderabad (Deccan), Dairatul Ma'arif an-Nizamiyya. vol. 1, pg. 454. This narration is *saheeh* in its authenticity. Sheikh Al-Albaani has also classified this narration as *saheeh* in his book *Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah* (pg. 50) stating that it is *saheeh* due to corroborating evidence.

By the way, this hadeeth and the previous hadeeth provide strong evidence that women should cover this faces while in the state of *Ihraam* during the Hajj when non-*mahram* men are present in close proximity and are thus able to see and stare at those women's faces.

Hadeeth # 10

عَنْ أُمِّ عَطِيَّةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: أُمِرْنَا أَنْ نُخْرِجَ الْحَيْضَ
يَوْمَ الْعِيدَيْنِ وَذَوَاتِ الْخُدُورِ فَيَشْهَدَنَ جَمَاعَةُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَ
دَعَوْتُهُمْ وَيَعْتَزِلُ الْحَيْضَ عَنْ مُصَلَّاهُنَّ، قَالَتِ امْرَأَةٌ
يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ اخْدَانَا لَيْسَ لَهَا جِلْبَابٌ؟ قَالَ: ((لَتُلْبِسَهَا
صَاحِبَتُهَا مِنْ جِلْبَابِهَا))

(صحيح البخارى، كتاب الصلاة، باب وجوب الصلاة فى الثياب)

Narrated by Um 'Atiya: "We were ordered by Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) to bring out our menstruating women and those in seclusion (*dhawaat al-khudoor*)²⁴¹ in the religious gatherings and invocation of Muslims on the two 'Eid festivals. These menstruating women were to keep away from their Musalla. A woman asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What about one who does not have a *jilbaab* (outer garment which covers the entire body of woman)?" He said, "Let her share the *jilbaab* of her companion."²⁴²

²⁴¹ *Khudoor* is the plural of *khidr*. *Khidr/khudoor* refers to a curtain behind which a woman might retire so as not to be seen by non-*mahram* men, or to the inner apartments of women in general.

²⁴² Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book on Prayers, Chapter: Obligation of Dress for the Prayers

Sheikh Ibn Uthaimen in tafseer of this hadeeth explained:

"This hadeeth proves that the general norm amongst the women of the Sahabah (female companions) was that no woman would go out of her home without a cloak, fully concealed and if she did not possess a veil, then it was not possible for her to go out. It was for this reason that when Rasool Allah (*peace be upon him*) ordered them to go to the Place for Eid Salah, they mentioned this hindrance. As a result Rasool Allah (*peace be upon him*) said that someone should lend her a veil, but did not say they could go out without it. If Rasool Allah (*peace be upon him*) did not allow women to go out without a veil to a place like the Eid Salah, which has been ordered by Shari'ah for women and men alike, then how can people let women go out to market places and shopping centers where there is open intermingling of the sexes, without a veil."²⁴³

Hadeeth # 11

عَنْ أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: يَرْحُمُ اللَّهُ نِسَاءَ الْمُهَاجِرَاتِ الْأَوَّلِ لَمَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ ﴿وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ إِلَى جُنُوبِهِنَّ﴾ شَقَقْنَ مِرْوَطَهُنَّ فَاخْتَمَرْنَ بِهَا.

(صحيح البخارى، كتاب تفسير القرآن، باب وليضربن بخمرهن على جيوبهن)

Narrated by Ayesha, the mother of the believers: She used to say: "May Allah have mercy on the first Emigrant women (*Muhaajiroon*). When Allah revealed: **‘And (tell them) to draw their *khimaars* over their bosoms**

²⁴³ Ibn Uthaimen, Mohammad, Hijab: In Light of Qur'an and Sunnah (1408 Hijra) Riyadh, Maktab A-Ta'awun li dawah wal Irshad. pg. 11.

(*juyooob*)', they tore off their aprons or waistsheets (*izars*) and used them as *khimaars*.²⁴⁴

Ibn a Al-Asqalanee in the commentary of this hadeeth said that the phrase, “فَاخْتَمَرْنَ أَيْ غَطَيْنَ وَجُوهَهُنَّ” in the above Hadeeth means that they "covered their faces".²⁴⁵

Position of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him)

In the preceding section, we have seen that the covering of the face was the standard and normal practice in the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Earlier we have given the verdicts of various companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the commentary of the verses of Surah Al-Ahzab and Surah An-Noor. Here we will give the statements of a few more of the companions in this regard:

Fatima bint al-Mundhir

It has been narrated by Fatima bint al-Mundhir who said:

عن فاطمة بنت المنذر انها قالت: كُنَّا نَخْمَرُ وُجُوهَنَا وَنَحْنُ مُحَرِّمَاتٌ وَنَحْنُ مَعَ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ.

(مؤطا امام مالك، كتاب الحج، باب وانما يعمل الرجل

مادام حيا فاذا مات فقد القضى)

²⁴⁴ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book of Tafseer of Qur'an (vol. 6, no. 282).

Commenting on this hadeeth of Ayesha, Imam Muhammad Al-Ameen Ash-Shanqiti wrote in *Adwaa-ul-Bayaan* (6/695) that this hadeeth is from the greatest and clearest proofs of the obligation of wearing Hijab for all Muslim women.

²⁴⁵ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath ul-Bari, vol. 8, p. 490.

"We used to veil our faces (*nukhammiru wujoohanaa*) when we were in Ihram in the company of Asmaa bint Abu Bakr As-Siddiq." (Muwatta)²⁴⁶

Ayesha Siddiq (the mother of the believers)

روی ابن عیینہ عن اسماعیل بن ابی خالد قال اخبرتنی امی و
اختی انهما دخلتا علی عائشة ام المؤمنین فسألتاها کیف
تخمر المرأة وجهها فاخذت اسفل خمارها فغطت به وجهها.

(الاستذکار، ابن عبدالبر، جلد 11، ص 48)

Ibn `Uyaina narrated: Ismael bin Khalid said that his mother and his sister reported to him that the two of them went to Ayesha (the mother of the believers) and asked her as to how a woman can cover her face (*tukhammiru wajhahaa*). Ayesha took the lower portion of her *khimaar* and covered her face with it."²⁴⁷

Umm Ismael bin Abu Khalid

کنا ندخل علی أم المؤمنین يوم الترویة فقلت لها یا ام المؤمنین هنا
امراة تأبی ان تغطي وجهها وهي محرمة فرفعت عائشة خمارها من
صدرها فغطت به وجهها.

(التلخیص الحبر، ابن حجر عسقلانی)

"We (women) used to visit Ayesha (the mother of the believers) on the 8th of Dhul Hajj so I asked her: "O the mother of the believers: We have a woman here who is refusing to cover her face while in the state of *Ihraam*.

²⁴⁶ Imam Malik's Muwatta, Book on Hajj (Book 20, hadeeth # 20.5.16). This hadeeth has been graded as authentic in its chain (*saheeh al-isnad*) by Sheikh Albaani.

²⁴⁷ Ibn Abdul Barr, Yusuf ibn Abdullah (2000) Al-Istadhkaar. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. Vol.11, pg. 48.

Hence, Ayesha took the lower portion of her *khimaar* from her chest and veiled her face with it.”²⁴⁸

On a side note, this narration by Umm Ismael bin Abu Khalid and the previous narration by Fatima bint al-Mundhir provide strong evidence that women should cover this faces while in the state of *Ihraam* during the Hajj when non-*mahram* men are present in the close proximity.

Abdullah Ibn Abbas

As mentioned earlier, Ibn Kathir provides a commentary of verse 59 of Surah al-Ahzab from Ibn Abbas, a cousin of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and an expert in the commentary of the Qur'an:

أمر الله نساء المؤمنين إذا خرجن من بيوتهن في حاجة أن يغطين وجوههن من فوق رؤوسهن بالجلباب ويبدین عینا

واحدة۔

“Allah commanded the believing women that when they come out of their homes for a necessity, they cover their faces from over their heads, with the *jilbaab*, and that they expose (only) one eye.”²⁴⁹

Ubaida Salmaani

Ubaida Salmaani is another well known companion of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Imam Muhammad bin Sirin (Ubaida's student and a well-known scholar in his own right) said "When I asked Ubaida how the *jilbaab* was to be worn, he demonstrated it to me by pulling a sheet of cloth over his head to cover his entire

²⁴⁸ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalaani, Al-Talkhees al-Habeer, Madinah Munawwara, vol. 2, pg. 272. Grading of this hadith?

²⁴⁹ Ibn Kathir, Hafiz Imad ud din Abul Fida. Tafseer Ibn Kathir Vol 2.

As mentioned earlier, please provide grading for this hadith. Also, page number for this citation?

body, leaving the left eye uncovered. This was also the explanation of the word '*Alaihinna*' in this verse (33:59)."²⁵⁰

Position of Islamic Scholars Regarding Niqab

In the following lines, the verdicts of the top most scholars in Islamic history will be given from all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. In the Hanafi school of thought, Imam Ibn Abideen, Ibn Najeem and Ala'uddin al-Haskafee are considered the top most scholars. Here is their position regarding niqab of women:

Imam Ibn Abideen

(وتمنع المرأة الشابة (من كشف الوجه بين الرجال) لا لانه عورة بل لخوف الفتنة.

“Young woman will be prohibited to uncover her face in front of unrelated men. It is not because the face is considered `awrah (that which needs to be covered), but it will be done because of the fear of *fitnah* (temptation).”
(*Radd al-Muhtar ala ad-Dur al-Mukhtar*)²⁵¹,

Ibn Najeem Hanafi

قال مشائخنا تمنع المرأة الشابة من كشف وجهها بين الرجال في زماننا للفتنة.

²⁵⁰ Ibn Jarir Tabari, *Jaami Al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil ayi'l Qur'an*, vol. 22, pg.33 and Abu Bakr al-Jassas, *Ahkam-ul-Qur'an*, Vol.3, p.458

²⁵¹ Ibn Abideen ad-Damishqee, Muhammad Ameen bin Umar bin Abdul Aziz (died 1252 A.H./ 1836 C.E.) (1419 Hijra) *Radd al-Muhtar ala ad-Dur al-Mukhtar*. Beirut, Dar Ihya at-Turath al-Arabi. Vol. 2, pg. 72.

“Our scholars have issued this fatwa that a young woman will be prohibited to uncover her face in front of non-*mahram* men in our age due to the fear of *fitnah* (temptation).” (*Bahr ar-Raqaa'iq Sharh Kunz Ad Daka'ek*)²⁵²

Ala'uddin al-Haskafee

ولذا تمنع من كشف وجهها بين الرجال للفتنة.

“And, therefore, women will be prohibited from covering their faces in front of non-*mahram* men, for (fear of) *fitnah*.” (*al-Durr al-Muntaqa fi sharh al-Multaqa*)²⁵³

Abdurrehman Ibn Jawzee Al-Hanbali

وقد نص عليه احمد فقال الزينة الظاهرة الثياب وكل شيء منها عورة حتى الظفر ويفيد هذا تحريم النظر الى شيء من الاجنبيات لغير عذر فان كان لعذر مثل ان يريد ان يتزوجها او يشهد عليها فانه ينظر في الحالين الى وجهها خاصة فاما النظر اليها لغير عذر فلا يجوز لا لشهوة ولا لغيرها وسواء في ذلك الوجه والكفان وغيرهما من البدن. (زاد المسير)

(Abdurrahman Ibn Jawzee al-Hanbali said:) “Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal clarified that ‘*az-zeenah az-Zaahirah*’ (“the apparent adornment”, referred to in Qur’anic verse 24:31) refers to the clothes (*thiyaab*), and a woman’s whole body

²⁵² Ibn Najeem al-Hanafi, Zain ad-Din (died 970 A.H. /1563 C.E.) (n.d.) *Bahr ar-Raqaa'iq Sharh Kunz Ad Daka'ek*. Beirut, Dar ul-Ma'rifah. Vol. 1, pg. 284.

²⁵³ al-Haskafee, Ala'uddin_ (died 1677 C.E.) (n.d.) *al-Durr al-Muntaqa fi sharh al-Multaqa*. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. Vol. 1, pg. 121.

is *`awrah* (that which needs to be covered), which even includes her nails. This tells us that it is not permissible to cast a glance on a non-*mahram* woman without any lawful reason. If it is for some lawful reason, for instance, marriage proposal or testimony in the court, then in that case it is permissible only to look at a woman's face. But in the absence of any valid reason, it is not permissible to cast a glance at the face of a woman and in this issue, the commandment is same for the face, the two hands and the rest of the body.” (*Zaad al Masyr*)²⁵⁴

Ibn Taymiyyah

وقد حكى ابو عبيدة وغيره انها تدنى من فوق رأسها فلا تظهر
الا بعينها ومن جنسه النقاب فكن النساء ينتقبن وفي الصحيح
ان المحرمة لا تنتقب ولا تلبس القفازين فاذا كن مأمورات
بالجلباب لئلا يعرفن وهو ستر الوجه او ستر الوجه بالنقاب
كان الوجه واليدان من الزينة التي امرت الا تظهرها للأجانب.
(فتاوى ابن تيميه)

In the commentary of verse 59 of Surah al-Ahzab, Imam Ibn Taymiyyah writes:

“Abu Obaida and others have pointed out that a woman should draw down (her jilbaab) from above her head and should not expose any part of her body except her eye. The niqab is included in this category (of covering). Women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to wear the niqab (in public), (which we know) because, in a

²⁵⁴ Ibn Jawzi, Abdurrehman_ (died 597 A.H. /1201 C.E.) (n.d.) Zaad al Masyr. Qatar, al-Maktab al-Islami. Vol. 6, pg. 31, 32.

saheeh hadeeth, it has been mentioned that women should not wear niqab or gloves while in the state of Ihraam. Women were commanded to wear *jilbaab* so that they could not be recognized, which pertains to covering the face. It is for this reason that face and both hands are included in that type of *zeenah* (ornament) which the women are commanded to cover in front of *ajaanib* (that is, non-mahram men).” (*Majmoo'ul Fataawa*)²⁵⁵

Abul Barakaat ad-Dardeer al-Maliki

(و) غورة المرأة (مع رجل اجنبى) منها اى ليس بمحرم لها جميع البدن (غير الوجه والكفين) واما هى فليس بعورة وان
وجب عليها سترهما لخوف فتنة
ابو البركات احمد بن محمد بن احمد الدردير، الشرح الصغير، جلد ١، ص ٤٠١، مكتبة عيسى البابى الحلبي، مصر.

“A woman’s *`awrah* in front of non-mahram (unrelated) men, that is, those who are not her *mahram* (close male relatives), is her whole body except her face and two palms. These two areas are not her *`awrah* but, due to the fear of fitnah (temptation), it is *waajib* (obligatory) to cover the face and hands as well.” (*ash-Sharh as-Sagheer*)²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, Sheikul Islam (died 728 A.H./ 1328 C.E.) (1962 C.E.) Majmoo'ul Fataawa. Riyadh, Mat'ba ar-Riyadh. Vol. 22, pg. 110, 111.

²⁵⁶ Abul Barakaat ad-Dardeer, Ahmed bin Muhammad (died 1201 A.H.) (1953 C.E.) ash-Sharh as-Sagheer. Egypt, Maktaba al-Baabi al-Halabee. Vol.1, pg. 400, 401.

Imam al-Qurtubee al-Maliki

فى هذه الآفة ءللى ان الله تعالى اذن فى مسألتهم من وراء
ءءاب فى ءاة ءعرض او مسألة يستفتى بها وىءءل فى ذلك
ءمىع النساء بالمعنى وبما ءضمنه اصول الشرىعة من ان المرأة كلها
عورة بءنها وصوتها كما ءءءم فلا ءءوز كشف ذلك الا لءاة
كالشهادة علفها او ءاء ءكون بءنها

(الءامع لاءكام القرآن، امام مءمء بن اءمء القرطبى)

Famous commentator of the Qur'an and Maliki scholar Imam Qurtubee, while explaining verse 53 of Surah al-Ahzab ("ask them from behind a curtain (*hijaab*)...."), wrote:

"This ayah provides evidence that Allah permitted (men) to ask for help or religious guidance from the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him), from behind a curtain (*hijaab*). And this injunction encompasses all Muslim women because it is a principle of Islamic law that the whole body of a woman is *`awrah* which includes even her body and voice,²⁵⁷ as we discussed earlier. Hence, it is not permissible to expose those parts except in the case of need, such as the giving of evidence or if there is a disease in any part of her body (which needs to be shown to a male physician)."

(*Al-Jaami li Ahkaamul Qur'an*)²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ It must be noted that there exists a difference of opinions among the scholars whether the face and hands of a woman are considered *'awrah* or not.

²⁵⁸ Al-Qurtubee, Mohammad bin Ahmed bin Abu Bakr (died 1273 C.E.) (1985) *Al-Jaami' Li-Ahkaam-al-Qur'an*: Dar Ihya At-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut. vol. 14, pg. 227.

Imam Ghazali and Ibn Hajar are considered from amongst the greatest of the scholars not just in Shaafi fiqh but for all the Muslims. Abdul Hameed ash-Sharwan is also a prominent Shaafi scholar. Here are their verdicts about the issue of niqab.

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali

لسنا نقول ان وجه الرجل فى حقها عورة كوجه المرأة فى حقه بل
هو كوجه الامرء فى حق الرجل فيحرم النظر عند خوف الفتنة
فقط وان لم تكن فتنة فلا، اذلم تزل الرجال على ممر الزمان مكشوفى
الوجوه والنساء يخرجن منتقبات فلو استووا الامر الرجال بالتقرب او
منعن من الخروج.

(احياء العلوم، امام غزالي، كتاب النكاح، فصل سوم، آداب المعاشرة)

“We do not say that a man’s face is *`awrah* (that which needs to be covered) for a woman in the same way that the face of a woman is *`awrah* for a man. Rather, it (the man’s face) is like the face of a beardless boy for a (grown) man; in this case, looking is forbidden only if there is fear of sexual attraction (*fitnah*). If there is no *fitnah*, there is no prohibition. This is because men in every age (in Islamic history) go out with their faces uncovered whereas women go out while wearing the niqab. If men were similar to women in this case then either men would have been commanded to wear niqab or women would have been prohibited from going out of their homes.” (*Ihya al-Uloom*)

259

²⁵⁹ Ghazali, Imam Abu Hamid (died 505 A.H./ 1111 C.E.) (1978). *Ihya Ulum ad-Din*. Karachi, Darul Isha'at Publishers. Kitab an-Nikah (Book on Marriage), Chapter on “Etiquettes of Living in Society”. Pg. 82.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalanee

ويقوى الجواز استمرار العمل على جواز خروج النساء الى
المساجد والا سواق والاسفار منتقبات لئلا يراهن الرجال
ولم يؤمر الرجال قط بالانتقاب لئلا يراهم النساء فدل على
تغاير الحكم بين الطائفتين.

(فتح البارى، ابن حجر عسقلانى)

“Another evidence which supports the permissibility of women looking at men is the fact that right from the first era of Islam, women were permitted to go out, to the masjid, marketplaces and for travel, (as long as they wore) niqab on their faces, whereas men were never commanded to wear niqab so that women could not see them. Hence, it is a proof that the Islamic command is different for men and women in this regard.”

(*Fath ul-Baari*)²⁶⁰

Abu Hayyan Al-Andalusee

The great Spanish-Arab Islamic scholar Abu Hayyan while commenting on the statement of As-Suddee who explained the verse of *Surah al-Ahzab*: ‘She should cover one of her eyes, her forehead, and the other (lower) portion of her face, except (for) one eye.’ Abu Hayyan noted:

وكذا عادة بلاد اندلس لا يظهر من المرأة الا عينها الواحدة

“This is the custom of the women in the country of Andalus [the Islamic empire of Spain], today – nothing is visible from a woman’s body except for one eye.... The word ‘*alaihinna* (over themselves) refers to their entire bodies, or

²⁶⁰ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani. (died 852 A.H./ 1448 C.E.) *Fath ul-Baari*. vol. 9, p. 337.

it could just mean their faces, since in the Days of Ignorance, the thing that the women used to expose from themselves was the face.” (*Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet*)²⁶¹

Muhammad ibn Ahmed Ibn Juzay Al-Kalbi al-Maliki

"The Arab women used to expose their faces as the slave women did. This was something that called men to look towards them, so Allah commanded them to cast their jilbaabs over themselves, so that they may cover their faces with it.” (*At-Tas'heel Li-'Uloom at-Tanzeel*)²⁶²

Qadhi Al-Baidawi

Qadhi Al-Baidawi writes: "to let down over them a part of their outer garments" means that they should draw a part of their outer garment in front of their face and cover themselves" (*Tafseer al-Baidawi*, Vol. 4, p.168)²⁶³

Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bin Bazz

“We previously mentioned Allah’s statement: “And when you ask them (i.e. the Prophet’s wives) for something then ask them from behind a veil”, where He makes no exceptions (i.e. face or hands). This is a clear ayah, so it is obligatory to accept it and rely on it. The ruling found in this ayah applies generally to the Prophet’s wives as well as all other believing women....

²⁶¹ Abu Hayaan al-Andalusee (died 745 A.H. / 1344 C.E.) (1403 A.H.) *Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet*. Beirut, Dar al-Fikr. vol. 7. Pg. 250.

²⁶² Ibn Juzay Al-Kalbi al-Maliki, Muhammad bin Ahmed (died 741 A.H.) (1355 A.H.) *At-Tas'heel Li-'Uloom at-Tanzeel*. Egypt, Al-Maktaba at-Tajaariyya. vol.3, pg. 144.

²⁶³ Al-Baidawi, Qadhi Abdullah bin Umar (died 685 A.H. / 1286 C.E.) (1999). *Tafseer al-Baidawi*. Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. vol.4, pg. 168.

So fear Allah O Muslims! And take hold of the hands of your women and prevent them from doing what Allah has forbidden, such as unveiling, showing off their adornment, exposing their features, and imitating the enemies of Allah. And know that remaining silent with them (when your women commit these evil deeds) is the same as participating with them in their sin and in receiving Allah's anger and punishment.”²⁶⁴

Sheikh Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaimeen

“Know, O Muslim that a woman's wearing Hijab and veiling her face in the presence of non-mahram males is obligatory. What directs us towards its obligation is the Book of your Lord, may He be Exalted, the Sunnah of your Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the correct (scholarly) opinions, and general analogy.”²⁶⁵

Sheikh Nasir un Din al-Albaani

Even though Sheikh al-Albaani took the position that face-covering in front of non-mahram men is recommended (*mustahab*) and not obligatory (*waajib*), being a true Islamic scholar, he gave sincere advices to Muslim women in his book *Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah* – things which the modernists and Muslims who like to keep the faces of their women uncovered in public never like to quote in their books. For instance, Sheikh Albaani wrote in his book:

²⁶⁴ Bin Baaz, Al-Uthaimeen, Al-Fawzaan & Al-Madkhalee. (2006) Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling. Alarcon, Abu Maryam Isma'eel (ed.). Al-Ibaanah, New York. pp. 20, 21.

²⁶⁵ Bin Baaz, Al-Uthaimeen, Al-Fawzaan & Al-Madkhalee. (2006) Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling. Alarcon, Abu Maryam Isma'eel (ed.). Al-Ibaanah, New York. pp. 27, 28.

فبينما ما يجب على المرأة و ما يحسن بها، من التزم الواجب فيها و نعمت، و من اخذ بالاحسن فهو افضل وهذا هو الذى التزمته عمليا مع زوجي، و ارجو الله تعالى ان يوفقني لمثله مع بناتي حين يبلغن
(حجاب المرأة المسلمة، علامه الباني)

“Thus, we have clearly stated what is obligatory for women and what is highly recommended. So, whosoever has grasped tightly what is obligatory then that will be sufficient for them and also better for them and whosoever has grasped the better will be better. And this (face-veil) is exactly the one which my own wife observes and I hope from Allah that may Allah grant me the guidance regarding my daughters (to observe this face-veil) when they come of age.”²⁶⁶

He also notes in his book the following:

فمن حجب ذلك اى الوجه و الكفين ايضا منهن، فذلك ما نستحبه و ندعو اليه (حجاب المرأة المسلمة، علامه الباني)

“Whoever has covered both of these, i.e. face and hands, then this is what we regard as highly recommended and this is what we invite all women to.”²⁶⁷

Sheikh Saalih bin Fawzaan

والمرأة كلها عورة لقوله صلى الله عليه وسلم والمرأة عورة رواه الترمذى هذه النصوص وما جاء بمعناها من الكتاب والسنة وهى كثيرة شهيرة تدل على ان المرأة كلها عورة امام الرجال الاجانب
(الملخص الفقهي)

²⁶⁶ Albaani, Sheikh Nasir ud Din (died 1999 C.E.) (1996) Hijab al-Mar'at al-Muslimah. Lahore, al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah. pg. 7

²⁶⁷ Ibid. pg. 8.

“A woman’s whole body is *awrah* (that which must be covered). The evidence comes from the narration of At-Tirmidhi which states that the whole of the woman is *awrah*.... This as well as other similar texts from the Qur’an and Sunnah testify that the whole body of a woman is *awrah* in front of non-*mahram* men.” (*Al-Mulakhass al-Fiqhee*)²⁶⁸

Ashraf Ali Thanwi

A famous Hanafi scholar and prolific writer from the Indian subcontinent, Ashraf Ali Thanwi, explained the Islamic position on hijab as follows:

"It is not permissible for a young woman to expose her face in the presence of *ghayr-mahrams* (non-*mahram* men), nor should she stand in a place where she could be observed. We learn from this, that the custom of exposing the bride's face in public where all the men can observe her is also not permissible. To do so is a major sin." (*Bahishti Zewar*)²⁶⁹

Syed Abul A'la Maududi

“A person who considers carefully the wordings of the Qur’anic verses, their well-known and generally accepted meaning and the practice during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) cannot dare deny the fact that the Islamic Shari’ah enjoins on the woman to hide her face from the other people and this has been the practice of the Muslim women ever since the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself.” (*Al-Hijab*)²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Fawzaan, Sheikh Saalih bin Fawzaan (1423 A.H.). Al-Mulakhass al-Fiqhee. Riyadh, Idara al-Bahooth al-Ilmiyyah wal-Iftaa. vol.1, pg. 42, 43.

²⁶⁹ Thanvi, Ashraf Ali (died 1943 C.E.) (1981) Bahishti Zewar (Urdu) Karachi, Darul Isha’at.

²⁷⁰ Maududi, Syed Abul A’la (died 1979 C.E.) (1990) Al-Hijab (Urdu) Lahore, Islamic Publications.

Muhammad Al-Ameen Ash-Shanqiti

“It is quite strange to find those who claim to have knowledge, saying that there cannot be found in the Qur’an and Sunnah that which indicates that a woman must veil her face in front of non-mahram men even though the Sahaabiyat did it, enacting Allah’s Commandment in His Book and having faith in His Revelation. The fact of the matter is that this understanding is established in the Saheeh Collection.” (*Tafseer ‘Awdaa-ul-Bayaan*)²⁷¹

Obligatory Conditions for an Islamic Hijab

The Islamic rulings on *hijab* refer to the set of rules and regulations about attitudes, dress, manners and modes of conduct and behavior of the sexes, including rules for women to properly cover their bodies when they go out. The Islamic concept of *hijab* is logical and, if practiced in its true sense, is highly successful in closing the doors to a number of social evils.

Islam commands that a woman's body should be covered by loose-fitting, non-transparent clothing so that the shape of her body is not revealed. The Hijab hides the beauty of the woman's form. According to the Qur’an and Sunnah, the following are the obligatory criteria for a woman’s hijab:

1. Covering all of the Body

The hijab should cover the whole body of the woman. This includes the face if women are going out or in front of non-*mahram* men, as discussed earlier.

²⁷¹ Ash-Shanqiti, Muhammad Al-Ameen (died 1973 C.E.) (1426 A.H.) *Tafseer ‘Awdaa-ul-Bayaan*. Makkah, Dar ‘Alam al-Fawaaid. Vol. 6, pg. 595.

2. The Hijab must not be Transparent

The purpose of wearing hijab must be achieved. In order for the hijab to be a cover, it must not be made of transparent material making the woman covered only by name, while in reality she is naked. The prophet (peace be upon him) is quoted as saying: "In the latest part of my Ummah (nation of Muslims) there shall be women who would be naked in spite of being dressed, they have their hair high like the humps of the *Bukht* camel, curse them, for they are cursed. They will not enter Al-Jannah and would not even perceive its odor, although its fragrance can be perceived from a distance of 500 years traveling by camel."²⁷²

This indicates that a woman could fall into a grave and destructive sin if she puts on a garment that is thin and transparent and which clearly shapes her body's features. Women must not wear clothes that are tight-fitting, hence, revealing the shapeliness of their bodies.

3. Hijab must be Loose, not Tight

The hijab is a safeguard against fitnah. If it is tight, it will be descriptive of the woman's body and this violates and defeats the whole purpose of hijab. A tight-fitting garment outlines the body and reveals it in front of non-mahram males. Thus, wearing of tight jeans (skinny jeans or pants) is forbidden for Muslim women.

There is one misconception among some modernist Muslims regarding Sheikh Al-Albaani's position regarding the wearing of pants by women. These modernists claim that it is ok to wear tight pants as long as we cover our hair with a scarf because Sheikh Al-Albaani said so. But the

²⁷² Reported in Musnad Ahmed (2/356) and Saheeh Muslim (no. 2128) from the narration of Abu Hurairah.

reality is that Sheikh Al-Albaani said something otherwise. He gave the following verdict about women's wearing of pants:

“These pants that women wear particularly nowadays outline the shape of the thighs and the buttocks, and sometimes even more than that! Who says that it is permissible to wear this? No Muslim would say this at all. So when a woman appears in these tight clothes, they outline her *awrah*. Even if we go by its (famous) definition that contradicts the Qur'an and Sunnah, which is that the *awrah* is what is between the navel and the knees, it still exposes it. The thighs are *awrah*. So if they are outlined by these tightly-shaped pants, this may cause more temptation than the temptation caused by a woman's natural body appearance. For example, a woman may have a skin color that is not so enticing, but yet the color of her (tight) clothes may be enticing. So this is increasing temptation upon temptation.”²⁷³

4. The Hijab should not Resemble the Clothing of a Man

Islam respects the gender differences among men and women. Therefore, Islam dislikes men and women to wear clothes which blur the gender differences. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in one tradition:

"Allah curses those men who imitate women, and He curses those women who imitate men." (Al-Bukhari)²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Transcribed and translated into English from the audio tape “Awrat-ul-Mar’at-il-Muslimah” by Sheikh Nasir ud din Al-Albaani.

²⁷⁴ Bukhari, Abu Abdullah Mohammad bin Ismael, Sahih Al-Bukhari (Lahore: Khalid Ihsan Publishers, 1981); Book on Dress (*Kitabul Libaas*), Vol. 7, hadeeth # 773

5. The Hijab must not Resemble the Garments of non-Muslim Nations

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned us against the imitation of non-Muslims in dress as well as manners in the following hadeeth:

“Whoever imitates a people (nation) is one of them.”
(Sunan Abu Dawud)²⁷⁵

It must be noted here that Muslim men too should dress modestly. Therefore, some of the principles discussed above apply to mens’ dress as well and men must observe them.

Hijab with or without Niqab: In Conclusion

We have looked at the evidence from the Qur’an which prove that hijab with niqab is obligatory upon women. Then, we presented 11 *saheeh* or *hasan* traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which explain the Qur’anic injunctions about hijab presented in Surah An-Noor and Surah Al-Ahzab and also shed light on the practice of female companions at the time of Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) and how they used to veil their faces when they would leave their homes or encounter non-*mahram* men. This indicates clearly that wearing the face veil was a common practice during the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and not as some people claim, a cultural practice that appeared years later.

275 Sunan Abu Dawud. *Kitab al-Libaas* (The Book of Wearing of Clothes). Vol. 3, pg. 241. Also narrated in Musnad Ahmed. This hadeeth has been graded as *saheeh* (authentic) by Sheikh al-Albaani in his *Saheeh Al-Jami’* vol. 2, pg. 1058

We have also looked at the position taken by the Prophetic companions as well as our great Imams and other Islamic scholars regarding the issue of niqab from which it can be concluded that it is an agreed position by many respected scholars that the face and hands of the woman must be covered (*waajib*) because they consider the face as part of a woman's *awrah* while other scholars consider it obligatory because of *sadd baab zaree'ah* (closing the doors to likely temptation). For instance, if the woman is young and beautiful or the society around her is a corrupt one in which men do not lower their gaze, then it is prohibited for her to uncover her face and hands. Even the small minority of real Islamic scholars (but not modernists) who consider face veil as only Sunnah and not *waajib* are still of the opinion that, because modern times are particularly full of *fitnah* (mischief), women should go as far as to cover their faces because even the face may attract sexual glances from men.

The purpose of the niqab is to consummate perfection for a woman. It is more virtuous for her and also closer to the aims of the Shari'ah which is to prevent *fitnah* (temptation). Niqab severs the path of those who follow their lusts. To sum up, based on the Islamic teachings, covering the face for women with the niqab is a general rule when they encounter non-*mahram* men or when they go out in public while uncovering the face is the exception.

Niqab – In Light of Modern Scientific Research

The human face is a fascinating system which consists of 44 separate muscles. Out of those 44 muscles, only 4 are devoted to chewing, while 40 are used for facial expressions. One group of muscles becomes active in response to positive feelings while another group of muscles by negative feelings. Our facial muscles respond naturally without our conscious choice.²⁷⁶ The human face is amazing, a fact which has been noted in the Qur'an, asking for our faith and our thankfulness:

﴿أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ﴿٨﴾ وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ ﴿٩﴾﴾

“Have We not given him two eyes? And a tongue and a pair of lips?”

The face is the most honored part of human body. It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) forbade striking or slapping the face of any human being:

“When one of you fights with his brother, he

²⁷⁶ HeartMath LLC (2002). The Inside Story - Understanding the Power of Feelings. Boulder Creek, California, HeartMath LLC.

should avoid striking the face.”
(Sahih Muslim)²⁷⁷

In explaining this hadeeth, Imam Nawawi wrote: “The scholars have said that this is an indication and directive to avoid hitting the face because the face holds and displays the beauty and its parts are precious.”²⁷⁸

There is no doubt that the beauty of human beings lies in their faces. It is the embodiment of a person’s beauty in addition to it being of sublime nature. The human face is the most stable indicator of beauty. From the legend of Cleopatra’s beauty to the supermodels in the advertisement industry, the face is the source of sexual attraction and icon of fame. In a world of six billion other faces, our face is unique. This is as true for us today as it is for the Egyptian mummies.

The face is perhaps the busiest part of the body, used extensively in communication. The face of a person plays an important role in his/her interaction with other members of the society. Research has shown that the face of a person may be regarded as a key determinant in impression formation by other people.²⁷⁹ This means that the

277 Sahih Muslim. *Kitab Al-Birr wa Sila’ wal-Adab* (Book of Virtue, Good Manners And Joining Of The Ties Of Relationship) Chapter 30: *Baab an-Nahee an-Darb al-Wajh’* (It is Forbidden to Strike at the Face). Narrated by Abu Huraira.

278 Nawawi, Yahya ibn Sharaf (died 676 A.H. / 1278 C.E.) (1981) Sahih Muslim with Sharh Imam Nawawi Lahore, Khalid Ihsan Publishers. See *Kitab Al-Birr wa Sila’ wal-Adab* (Book of Virtue, Good Manners And Joining Of The Ties Of Relationship) Vol. 2.

279 Berry, D.S. and McArthur, L.Z. (1986). "Perceiving character in faces: The impact of age-related craniofacial changes on social perception." Psychological Bulletin 100: 3-18.

impression formed of a person by other members of the society upon meeting him/her is heavily influenced by facial features of that person. People judge us based on our face. The face reveals our feelings and what is really going on deep down inside us.

It is also well-known that women throughout the world spend millions of dollars on their facial beauty. Companies manufacturing 'beauty' products earn immense profit in sales. In fact, the products used to beautify the face far exceed products for beautification of the rest of the body. This in itself proves that human beings are always concerned about their looks. Some women take great pride and spend much time in making up their faces and spend large amounts of money on cosmetic products.

Because the face carries so much importance in defining human attraction, especially the beauty of women, Muslim women are required to hide away their beauty. The veil forms part of their concealment. In this chapter, the importance of the Islamic commandment of wearing niqab (face-veil) will be discussed in light of scientific research.

Modesty & the Psychology of Women

No matter how much social engineering is recommended by the feminists, it is not easy to change the nature of the two genders. U.S. psychologist Havelock Ellis explained the sense of modesty as follows:

“Modesty, which may be provisionally defined as an almost instinctive fear promoting to concealment and usually centering around the sexual processes, while common to both sexes is more peculiarly feminine, so that it may almost be regarded as the chief secondary

sexual character of women on the psychical side.”²⁸⁰

Women tend to have far more sense of modesty than men by nature. This feminine sense of modesty manifests itself in every aspect of life, including sports. As a matter of fact, feminist writer Iris Young suggested in her essay “Throwing like a girl” that men’s superior “sporting efforts more often display bravado than genuine skill and co-ordination.” On the contrary, she noted that “women often approach a physical engagement with timidity, uncertainty and hesitancy.”²⁸¹ She further argued that girls’ apparent lack of competence in activities such as throwing and hitting in games was due to the fact that girls tend not to extend their bodies fully when participating in physical activities. She clearly stated that “a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space.”²⁸² What Iris Young is referring to here is the inherent sense of shame and modesty in females which does not allow them “to extend their bodies fully when participating in physical activities” and women feel that they are “not free to move beyond.” For feminists, such a sense of modesty may be a hindrance and deficiency among women and they are fighting tooth and nail to eliminate this sense of modesty from the minds of women. However, Islam does not see such a sense of modesty as a deficiency. Islam considers

²⁸⁰ Ellis, Havelock (1910). “The Evolution of Modesty”. Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Vol. I, Philadelphia, F.A. Davis.

²⁸¹ Young, Iris (1990). Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy. Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

²⁸² Ibid.

modesty as the most valuable asset for a woman. In fact, Islam recognizes that there is a “space which surrounds women in their imagination”, protects it and makes it holy by commanding the Muslim women to wear a veil and loose-fitting clothing in public spaces. Islam praises this feminine sense of modesty. Modesty is so important that in one hadeeth, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarded “modesty & inhibition” as the salient feature of the Islamic culture:

لِكُلِّ دِينٍ خُلُقٌ وَخُلُقُ الْإِسْلَامِ الْحَيَاءُ (مَوْطَا امام مالك)

“Every religion has a characteristic (khulq) and the characteristic of Islam is modesty & inhibition (hayaa).” (Muwatta Imam Malik)²⁸³

Purpose of the Face Veil – Anthropological Perspective

In discussing the objective behind the face veil, Columbia University anthropologist Robert F. Murphy notes that when people in a society (whether females or males) cover their faces “so completely that only areas around the eyes and nose may be seen”, in doing so “they are symbolically introducing a form of distance between their selves and their social others.”²⁸⁴ Robert Murphy continues: “The veil, though providing neither isolation nor anonymity, bestows

²⁸³ Malik, Imam (1402 A.H.). Muwatta Imam Malik. Lahore, Islamic Academy Urdu Bazaar. *Kitaab al-Jaameh* (The Book on Comprehensive Topics), vol. 1, pg. 613

²⁸⁴ Murphey, Robert F. (Dec., 1964). “Social Distance and the Veil”. American Anthropologist **66**(6) Part 1, 1257-1274.

facelessness and the idiom of privacy upon its wearer and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction while remaining a part of it.”²⁸⁵

Likewise, the social benefits of face-veil have not escaped the observation of Muslim social scientists. Listen, for example, to Syed Abul A’la Maududi who noted the significance of Niqab from anthropological perspective in his book *Purdah and The Status of Women in Islam*:

“The face is the most impressive thing in the human body. It is the index of the natural human charms, the most attractive part and the one possessing great sex appeal for others. In order to appreciate this, one does not require any extensive knowledge of psychology. If one searches one’s own heart, asks for the verdict of one’s own eyes, and analyzes one’s own inner experiences, one will have to admit (as long as one is not hypocritical) that of all decorations of the body, the natural charm placed by the Creator in the structure of the face has the greatest sex appeal. That is the reason why if one has to marry a girl, one desires to see her face, if nothing else. If one is shown the whole figure of a girl but not her face, one is not satisfied. This proves that the beauty of the face is by far the most important point in the human body.

Now that this fact has been confirmed, let us proceed further. If it is not intended to prevent sexual anarchy and emotional dispersion in the society, then the female should have the freedom to expose the breasts, the arms, the shins and the thighs, besides the face, as in the modern Western civilization. In this case, all those restrictions and limits which have been imposed by the Islamic Law of Hijaab will be out of the question. But if, on the other hand, the object is to curb

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

indecentcy and obscenity in the society, then nothing can be more unreasonable than to close all the minor ways to indecentcy but to fling the main gate wide open.”²⁸⁶

Human Face – The Most Important Determinant of Physical Attractiveness

The physical attractiveness of a person is composed of various components such as the human face, the body's shape, hair style and color, clothes, etc. Social scientists have studied the determinants of physical attractiveness. In one study reported in the 1984 issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, it was assessed to see whether it is facial attractiveness that contributes more to overall attractiveness or if it is bodily attractiveness which contributes more. University of Illinois (Chicago) psychologist Kim T. Mueser and other participating scientists used twenty-one male subjects from the university as the judges in this study who were shown the pictures of fifteen white female students. The male judges were divided into three groups and they were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. They rated the physical attractiveness of female persons based on photos of the whole person, only the face, or only the body. Male judges in each group (7 males per group) rated slides of female subjects that were projected one at a time for 15 seconds onto a screen in front of the room. Ratings of physical attractiveness were made on a 10-point Likert scale.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Maududi, Syed Abul A'la (1990) Al-Hijab (Urdu) Lahore, Islamic Publications.

²⁸⁷ Mueser, Kim T., Grau, Barry W., Sussman, Steve & Rosen, Alexander J. (1984). "You're Only as Pretty as You Feel: Facial

The results of Mueser's study revealed that the face of the females in the study was a more important predictor of overall attractiveness than the body.²⁸⁸ Hence, it is the human face which plays the most important role in interpersonal attraction and interaction in society. If the female face is veiled from the visual access of men, this will create a social distance between men and women in society and it will be harder for men to exploit women, both physically as well as visually. Based on this research, the wisdom of the Islamic commandment of face veiling for women in front of non-*mahram* men can be easily understood.

The relationship of the human face to physical attractiveness (especially in the case of females) can also be understood from the research cited by Monahan in her book *Women in crime* which showed that beautiful women are convicted less often for crimes they are accused of committing compared to average faced women.²⁸⁹

The human face is also the most important determinant of the perceived age and, as a result, of perceived physical attractiveness. An important study in this context was conducted by the psychologists Kathleen M. Korthase and Irene Trenholme of the Elmhurst College of Illinois. The

Expression as a Determinant of Physical Attractiveness."
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **46**(2): 469-478.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Monahan, Florence (1941). Women in crime. New York, Washburn.

main purpose of this study, published in the 1982 issue of *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, was to determine if there existed an inverse relationship between perceived age and perceived physical attractiveness, i.e. do people perceive older faces as less attractive?²⁹⁰ In this study, four groups of 15 subjects were studied: adult males and females (ranging in age from 31 to 38 years) and adolescent males and females (age range from 14 to 16 years) when they were asked to rank two sets of photographs of male and female faces, according to physical attractiveness. It was found in the study that as the perceived age of the male or female in the photograph increased, their perceived physical attractiveness decreased. This observation was based purely on the attribution of beauty to a facial stimulus which shows the importance of the human face in the determination of physical beauty. Hence, it can be easily understood why Islam gave the permission for elderly women to uncover their faces in front of *non-mahram* men. After all, as the person becomes older, their facial attractiveness diminishes.

Another important finding in this study was that all the subjects of the study (which included males) “showed greater agreement for what constitutes females’ physical attractiveness than for what constitutes males’ physical attractiveness.”²⁹¹ This study by psychologists Korthase

²⁹⁰ Korthase, Kathleen M. & Trenholme, Irene (1982). "Perceived Age and Perceived Physical Attractiveness." Perceptual and Motor Skills **54**: 1251-1258.

²⁹¹ Korthase, Kathleen M. & Trenholme, Irene (1982). "Perceived Age and Perceived Physical Attractiveness." Perceptual and Motor Skills **54**: 1251-1258.

and Trenholme again supports our contention that in society, the contribution of facial beauty towards physical attractiveness is greater in the case of women as compared to men. Hence, the Islamic commandment for women (and not men) to cover their faces when they go out in society can be easily understood.

What Women Want – What Men Want

What is the criterion used by men and women in terms of selection of their potential mates? Several scientific research studies have shown that the criterion of mate preference used by men is very different than that used by women. In a study published in the March 2001 issue of *Evolution & Human Behavior*, Robert Montgomerie and Deborah Hume from Queen's University in Ontario asked hundreds of volunteers to rate how attractive they found different faces of the opposite sex, all shown without jewelry or make-up and with hair combed back. Men rated healthy (which means good looking) women most highly. However, for women, the most important factor in attractiveness was the perceived socio-economic status of the men.²⁹² Nancy Etcoff, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, in her book *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* puts it more clearly: "Men are evaluated by their income and professional status as harshly as women are evaluated by their looks."²⁹³

²⁹² Hume, Deborah K. & Montgomerie, Robert. (March 2001) "Facial attractiveness signals different aspects of 'quality' in women and men." *Evolution & Human Behavior* **22 (2)**: 93–112.

²⁹³ Etcoff, Nancy (1999). Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty. New York, Anchor Books.

In 1989, Psychologist David M. Buss of the University of Michigan and author of *The Evolution of Desire* conducted a comprehensive study in this regard. He analyzed the gender differences in mate preferences in 37 different cultures of the world, from 33 countries located on six continents and five islands. The countries in the study ranged from New Zealand to West Germany, from Iran to Brazil, from China and India to United States and Canada, from Japan to Nigeria. This is the first study of its kind done on more than 10,000 people which examined human mate preferences across cultures on a broad scale.

The results of this comprehensive scientific study revealed that men compared to women valued characteristics signaling reproductive capacity in their potential mates whereas women gave more importance to resource acquisition in their potential mates. Hence, of all the listed characteristics, men appeared to give more value to relative youth and physical attractiveness in women because of their links with fertility and reproductive value. Conversely, of all the characteristics listed in three different sections of this study (such as good looks, dependable character, sociability, chastity, intelligence, etc.), women gave more value to characteristics such as good earning capacity and good financial prospects in their potential mates. This difference in mate selection criteria among men and women appears to be universal. In discussing the findings of this study, psychologist Buss notes:

“Males value physical attractiveness and relative youth in potential mates more than do females – sex differences that show remarkable generality across

cultures.... Although cultural variations exist with respect to standards of beauty, these variations apparently do not override sex differences in the importance attached to physical attractiveness.”²⁹⁴

Features of female physical appearance associated with youth include smooth facial skin, good muscle tone, lustrous hair, bright eyes and full lips which have been shown to be perceived as the strongest cues to female reproductive capacity, as was pointed out by anthropologist Donald Symons in his book *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*.²⁹⁵

In the same vein, John Marshall Townsend, Ph.D., professor of anthropology at Syracuse University in New York, has published his findings in his book *What Women Want – What Men Want: Why the Sexes Still See Love and Commitment So Differently*. In one of his experiments, he staged photos of men dressed up in two costumes: a high-status, white dress shirt, tie and blazer; or the uniform of a fast-food chain employee. Then he showed these photos to young women and asked them whom they would rather meet for coffee. In this experiment, women chose the ugly or average-face man in high-status dress over a very handsome man in the hamburger-chain uniform. On the other hand, in a similar experiment with women in uniform, men always chose the prettier girl and ignored the status signals. Hence, costumes did not affect the ratings of men, who concentrated more on the looks of the woman, but the

²⁹⁴ Buss, D. M. (1989). "Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures." Behavioral and Brain Sciences **12**: 1-49.

²⁹⁵ Symons, Donald. (1979). The Evolution of Human Sexuality. New York, Oxford University Press.

costumes did affect women's ratings because those women paid more attention to men's socioeconomic status than merely their looks.²⁹⁶ In addition, Dr. Townsend's group also surveyed 160 law students using the costume experiment but this time adding the written description. Again, as expected, the results showed that men were "more willing to have coffee and conversation with the prettiest model than with the less attractive model – whether in the high-status or low-status costume." Hence, not a lot has changed since Cinderella's days. Even though in this study, beauty of the models was based on their body and face and hair, we have already shown in the previous section that human face is the most important determinant of physical attractiveness. Even if there was a contribution of body and hair in terms of attractiveness, human face is still the most important determinant of prettiness. Furthermore, in this study, the researchers tried to control variables such as body of men or women in the photographs (e.g. men or women in the photographs were not extra fat or slim).

The above-mentioned research as well as the research on various cultures of the world is showing clearly that men in all cultures care more about good looks of women (of which face is the most important determinant) whereas women do not. Here again, the wisdom of the Islamic commandment of the face veil (*niqab*) for women can be understood easily when the Qur'an says to women:

²⁹⁶ Townsend, John Marshall (1998). What Women Want – What Men Want: Why the Sexes Still See Love and Commitment So Differently. New York, Oxford University Press.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
يُذْنِبْنَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرِفْنَ فَلَا
يُؤْذِنَنَّ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا﴾^{٥٩}

“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks ("Jalabib" or veils) over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known (as such) and not molested: and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Surah Al-Ahzab: 59)

Another interesting part of Dr. Townsend’s book is composed of in-depth interviews that he conducted with 50 medical students, both male and female. In those interviews, “85 percent of the men mentioned physical attractiveness as the trait most important to them in choosing a partner for serious relationships. Only 10 percent of the women gave this response.”²⁹⁷ Not a single woman expressed eagerness to marry a man who made less money than she would. This is exactly what the Qur’an says when it talks about the two genders, keeping in view the nature of women:

²⁹⁷ Townsend, John Marshall (1998). What Women Want – What Men Want: Why the Sexes Still See Love and Commitment So Differently. New York, Oxford University Press.

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى
بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾

*“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,
because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and
because they spend (to support them) from their means.”*

(Surah An-Nisa [The Women]: 34)

“You Can *Feel* Them Looking at You” – Women by their Nature Do Not like Men to Stare at Them

Modesty is so much ingrained in the very nature of women that they do not like men to stare at them. Research has shown that many women say they feel “objectified” by the male gaze. In a study published in 1995 in *Ownership of space: Its impact on recreational participation of young women*, social scientist Kandy James of the Edith Cowan University (Australia) attempted to measure girls’ attitudes to different public and private sites for recreation in the community. Her study surveyed 276 fifteen-year-old girls from 10 socio-economically diverse Western Australian high schools, as regard to how they felt about 20 listed recreational spaces. The study found that the spaces where girls felt most self-conscious were in rank order: school basketball courts, public swimming pools, health clubs and beaches. One very interesting finding from the study was the girls’ ranking of recreational places that they would use more if boys were NOT around. Based on James’ investigation, the top four places listed by the girls were school basketball courts, public swimming pools,

amusement halls and school gyms.^{298,299} Similarly, another study conducted by the Girls in Space Consortia investigated young women's relationships to public space in Brisbane (Australia) and found that girls, in public places, experienced fear and risk of victimization, and that these feelings restricted their recreational activities in those spaces.³⁰⁰

In a follow-up study published in the *Journal of Leisure Research* in the year 2000, Dr. James investigated the feelings of girls at public swimming pools, i.e. why did the girls feel so uncomfortable and what did they do at pools to overcome their embarrassment. For many girls, a feeling of being watched by boys contributed to their discomfort. Krysta, a girl participant in the study, admitted that she felt strange at school swimming lessons: "I felt like people are staring at me. I hate my bathers for a start. It feels like I'm naked when I'm in my bathers. I hate the fact that you have legs showing and arms showing and your body."³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ James, Kandy (1995). Ownership of space: Its impact on recreational participation of young women. Perth, Western Australia, Edith Cowan University, Dept. of Leisure Sciences.

²⁹⁹ James, Kandy (1998). "Deterrents to active recreation participation: Perceptions of year 10 girls." Health Promotion Journal of Australia 8(3): 183-189.

³⁰⁰ Girls in Space Consortia (1997). Phase 1 report for the girls in space consortia research: A Project investigating young women's relationships to public space in Brisbane. Brisbane, Backbone Youth Arts Inc.

³⁰¹ James, Kandy (2000). "'You can feel them looking at you': The experiences of adolescent girls at swimming pools." Journal of Leisure Research 32(2): 262-280.

One girl participant, Vanessa, found mixed-gender swimming classes at school very embarrassing: “I hated going to the pool.... I felt really weird around [boys].” Another girl, Val, showed a concern for other girls about being watched by people that they did not know. She stated, “If you are down [at the pool] and you see a total stranger, then they just gawk at you and stare at you and you feel really weird.”³⁰²

Although there were some girls categorized as “achievers”, who regarded themselves as “tomboys” and who did not feel any embarrassment in the presence of boys at swimming pools, the majority of the girls were either “compromisers” (girls who tried to cover up their bodies in the presence of boys) or “avoiders” (girls who avoided the use of mixed-gender swimming pools altogether). The largest group, i.e. the compromisers, consisted of the girls who felt embarrassed in the presence of boys and, hence, they developed “a strategy of covering themselves up until the last possible moment.” What most of the girls did was to “wrap their towels around them and when they are about to jump in the pool they rip the towels off pretty quick[ly] and then jump in before anyone can have a chance to look at their body.”³⁰³

The embarrassment that girls felt in the presence of boys was so much that some of the girls were less concerned about drowning in water than being watched by boys. Dr. James Kandy noted:

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

“For most of the interviewees, it was actually seen as less threatening to be in water than to be exposed on the periphery.”³⁰⁴

Another study conducted by Dr. James was published in *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal* in the year 1999. The title of the study was: “‘I feel really embarrassed in front of the guys!’: Adolescent girls and informal school basketball.” The purpose of this study was to determine why the girls did not want to play basketball in the presence of boys. Nearly half of the girls in the original survey thought it would be a good idea for schools to have separate-sex areas for girls’ sports. Beth, one of the girl participants in the study, emphasized that she was in favor of the separation of boys and girls because she knows of girls “who really like basketball but... they don’t want to go and play with the guys... it would probably be good for them or even [for me] if I wanted to try it, to have just time on our own... maybe they [wouldn’t] feel as threatened.” Kaye, another girl thought that separation of boys and girls would be good “if you wanted to seriously exercise... and get fit... and you don’t really want them all staring at you....”³⁰⁵

Similarly, a study published in the Summer 1998 issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research* about American adolescent girls’ attitudes towards outdoor recreation programs found an agreement among the participant girls that a single-sex

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ James, Kandy (1999). “‘I feel really embarrassed in front of the guys!’: Adolescent girls and informal school basketball.” *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal* **46**(4): 11-16.

program would increase participation among girls: "If it was all girls and I saw some of them do it, I'd feel confident because they're girls and I'm a girl and I'd be like, "I can do that," versus if I saw boys do it, I wouldn't feel confident that I could do it."³⁰⁶

It is true that the participant girls in the swimming pool study mentioned above were wearing swimming suits in which they did not like the boys to stare at them but we also have to understand that this research was conducted in a Western secular country in which girls are classically conditioned right from their childhood to lose any sense of *hayaa'* (modesty, inhibition). Those girls are exposed to a sexually open atmosphere right from their early years. Still we can see that the majority of the girls in these research studies did not like the mixed-gender environment. They did not like boys staring at their bodies. "You can feel them looking at you," said one girl.³⁰⁷ They preferred and even attempted to cover their bodies in front of boys. Hence, those girls tried to make themselves less visible to the audience by covering their bodies. That is the whole idea of *Islamic hijab* that women have to *cover their bodies* in public places, in the presence of non-*mahram* men.

³⁰⁶ Culp, Rocklynn H. (Summer 1998). "Adolescent girls and outdoor recreation: a case study examining constraints and effective programming." Journal of Leisure Research **30**(3): 356-379.

³⁰⁷ James, Kandy (2000). ""You can feel them looking at you": The experiences of adolescent girls at swimming pools." Journal of Leisure Research **32**(2): 262-280.

Escape from Male Gaze Saves Girls from Inferiority Complex – Social Scientific Evidence

In a mixed-gender environment when women are not safe from the male gaze, scientific research by social psychologists suggests that women base their self-worth on how pretty they are. A good experimental model for mixed-gender versus single-sex environment is to look at coed versus single-sex schools. Indeed, this is what researchers did in Northern Ireland. Two psychologists, Granleese and Stephen, conducted their study in some neighborhoods in Belfast. They studied the self-esteem of girls at coeducational schools as well as in single-sex schools. There were no educational or socioeconomic differences between the two groups studied. At both types of schools, they asked the girls various types of questions: Are you a good student? Do you have a lot of friends? Are you good at sports? Do you think you are pretty? Do your parents have good jobs? Then, each girl's answers were correlated with that girl's self-esteem, as measured by a separate inventory.

The results of the study showed that girls in coed schools base their self-esteem only on how they look, are they pretty or not? It does not matter if they are getting A grades in the class or are failing the class, whether they have a lot of friends or not, etc. For girls attending coed schools, the most important issue to them is *how you look*, not what your conduct or behavior is or who you are. On the other hand, girls at single-sex schools base their self-esteem not solely on whether they are pretty or not, but also whether they have good conduct and behavior, school performance,

family income and other factors.³⁰⁸ Hence, girls in the mixed-gender environment become more conscious of their physical appearance and beauty, and they are more likely to suffer from inferiority complexes about their personality because they base their self-esteem primarily on the way they look. Conversely, girls in the separate-sex gatherings base their self-esteem on other, deeper aspects of their personality such as conduct, behavior, intelligence, etc.

The study mentioned above is not the only one which shows that a mixed-gender environment creates inferiority complexes and heightened awareness among girls about their appearance. In point of fact, Johns Hopkins sociologist James Coleman made the same discovery in the 1960s, interviewing students at many single-sex and coed high schools in the U.S.A. Coleman's findings are reported in *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education*. Coleman found that at coed schools, the biggest concern of the students, especially the girls, is who is the best-looking and who is the most popular. When the girls at coed schools were asked about their career aspirations, they mentioned becoming a fashion model or an actress. On the other hand, girls at single-sex schools aspired of seeking a career in business or the sciences.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Granleese, Jacqueline & Stephen, Joseph (Dec. 1993). "Self-perception Profile of Adolescent Girls at a Single-sex and a Mixed-sex School." Journal of Genetic Psychology **154**(4): 525-530.

³⁰⁹ Coleman, James S. (1961). The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education. New York, The Free Press.

According to Coleman's research, in the free-mixing environment of coed schools, girls become self-conscious about their physical beauty so much that girls come to feel that this is the only basis on which to excel. Such feelings among girls have profound effects on their psychology when they are the subject of the male gaze as is the case in coed schools. The girls become less content with their own selves and, hence, suffer from an inferiority complex, especially if they think that they are not as physically attractive as the other girls. Coleman notes: "The emphasis on popularity with the opposite sex has other effects on the girls, of which we have only the barest knowledge. One of the effects is on her feelings about herself. We may suppose that if a girl found herself in a situation where she was not successful in 'the things that count' [such as her physical appearance], she would be less happy with herself, and would want to change, to be someone different."³¹⁰

Commenting on the results of his research, Coleman writes: "It is commonly assumed that it is 'better' for boys and girls to be in school together, if not better for their academic performance, then at least better for their social development and adjustment. But this may not be so. Coeducation may be inimical [harmful] to both academic achievement and social development.... Just putting boys and girls together in the same school is not necessarily the 'normal, healthy' thing to do."³¹¹

³¹⁰ Coleman, James S. (1961). The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education. New York, The Free Press.

³¹¹ Coleman, James S. (1961). The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and its Impact on Education. New York, The Free Press.

Similarly, studies on school-age children have demonstrated that for girls, the criterion of success is not to get the best grades but social success. Most of the times, girls are more concerned about what others thought of them than their grades.³¹²

These researches not only prove the superiority of separate-sex education but also provide evidence that the Islamic commandment of face-covering of women in front of non-*mahram* men boosts self-confidence among girls. By hiding their beauty and charms through Niqab, Muslim women do not feel “objectified” by the male gaze. Hence, Islamic *hijab* saves women from developing an inferiority complex. With niqab on, Muslim women do not have to worry about what other people think of their looks.

Courtship, Dating and Testing Waters before Marriage

In Islamic teachings, all forms of premarital intimacy, including taking a boyfriend or girlfriend, are prohibited (*haram*) (Surah An-Nisa: 25). In Islam, there is no room for courtship and dating. A Muslim woman is commanded to cover up her face in front of non-*mahram* men. Only under certain exceptions (such as a marriage proposal or business dealings (under certain circumstances or medical treatment or witness in the court, etc.) are women allowed to display their faces in front of men. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said in one tradition:

³¹² Hoyenga, K.B. & Hoyenga, K. (1980). Sex Differences. Boston, Little Brown and Company.

إِذَا خَاطَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ امْرَأَةً فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا إِذَا كَانَ
 إِنَّمَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا لِخُطْبَةٍ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَا تَعْلَمُ.

(مسند احمد عن ابو حميد)

“When one of you (believer) intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, so long as his looking at her is only for the purpose of the intention of marriage. And this is even if she is unaware of it.”³¹³

According to Islamic law, a man and a woman are non-mahram for each other until their marriage (*nikaah*) and departure of the bride from her parent’s home to the home of her husband. Just a betrothal ceremony cannot make the man and woman a spouse (*mahram*) of each other. It has been clearly stated in a tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) regarding unrelated men and women:

لَا يَخْلُونَنَّ رَجُلٌ بِامْرَأَةٍ إِلَّا كَانَ ثَالِثَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ

رواه الترمذى (1171) و صححه الالبانى فى صحيح الترمذى

"Whenever a man is alone with a woman the Devil makes a third." (At-Tirmidhi)³¹⁴ This hadeeth means that the seclusion of unrelated men and women together is a guaranteed invitation to Satan. It is well known that proximity is the most important predictor of love. Under such circumstances when unrelated men and women are together in seclusion, temptations are greater and, consequently, human basic instincts and desires can be kindled and regrettable things can happen. Therefore, we

³¹³ Sheikh Al-Albaani authenticated it in his *as-Saheehah* (no. 97) where he said: "its chain of narration is authentic. Its narrators are all reliable, according to the standard of Imam Muslim."

³¹⁴ At-Tirmidhi (hadeeth 1171). Sheikh Al-Albaani authenticated it in his *as-Saheeh* At-Tirmidhi.

must never be alone with a woman who is not *mahram* to us (even if she is our future wife).

These days it is shown in TV dramas or movies in Muslim countries that after betrothal but before their marriage, a man and a woman contact each other on the phone, they meet in private and engage in romantic conversations, enjoy picnics in parks and at the riverside or travel together for recreation in the absence of their guardians, on Valentine's Day they exchange romantic love-cards and chocolates, etc. All these actions are completely forbidden (*haraam*) for couples who are not yet married, and celebrating innovated holidays such as Valentine's Day falls under the category of prohibited imitation of non-Muslim cultures. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said in a tradition:

مَنْ تَشَبَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ. (سنن ابو داود)

“Whosoever imitates a people is one of them.” (Sunan Abu-Dawud)³¹⁵

In another tradition, he (peace be upon him) regarded *hayaa* (modesty and inhibition) as the most important characteristic of Islamic culture:

لِكُلِّ دِينٍ خُلُقٌ وَخُلُقُ الْإِسْلَامِ الْحَيَاءُ (موطا امام مالك)

“Every religion has a characteristic (*khuluq*) and the characteristic of Islam is modesty and inhibition (*hayaa*).” (Muwatta Imam Malik)³¹⁶

315 Sunan Abu Dawud. *Kitab al-Libaas* (The Book of Wearing of Clothes). Vol. 3, pg. 241. Also narrated in Musnad Ahmed. This hadeeth has been graded as *saheeh* (authentic) by Sheikh al-Albani in his *Sahih Al-Jami'* vol. 2, pg. 1058

316 Malik, Imam. Muwatta Imam Malik. *Kitaab al-Jaameh* (The Book on Comprehensive Topics), vol. 1, pg. 613

The word “*hayaa*” (modesty and inhibition) in the Arabic language shares the same root as “*hayaat*” which means “life or existence”. This indicates a deep connection between the two words, and means that the life of the Muslim nation lies in its modesty and inhibition. When shamelessness and immodesty will prevail among the Muslims, it will result in the death of the Muslim nation. In another tradition, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned the believers:

إذا لم تستحي فاصنع ما شئت. (صحيح بخاری)

*“If you do not have modesty & shame (hayaa) then do whatever you like to do.” (Saheeh Bukhari)*³¹⁷

Islam is a religion in complete agreement with human nature. Islam does not permit men and women to have relationships outside of marriage, and part of the wisdom of this may be because during courtship or premarital love, the two of them show to each other only the bright aspects of their lives. After marriage, the two of them cannot keep up with their artificial premarital romantic roles and the bitter realities of life start to appear.

In the modern culture of the sexual revolution, it is believed that ‘testing the waters’ before marriage helps men and women in determining compatibility. Germaine Greer in *The Whole Woman* refutes the popular idea of courtship, dating and ‘testing the waters’ before marriage: “Some of the briefest marriages are those that follow a long period of

³¹⁷ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book on Ettiquetes (Kitab al-Adab), Chapter: If you do not have modesty then do whatever you like to do. (Hadeeth No. 5769)

cohabitation.”³¹⁸ It is little wonder that the modern sexual revolution has brought the highest rates of divorce, unprecedented in human history.

There is enough scientific evidence by psychologists and sociologists suggesting that dating, courtship and premarital sex are detrimental to forming future, long-term marital relationships. Psychologists who study teenage dating tell us that during this time period, romantic relationships form most often on the basis of rank order instead of personal characteristics. This means that when teenagers form romantic pairs, they do this less on the basis of personal qualities and more on the basis of how popular the teenager is in the teenager’s group. Hence, the most popular boy in the group “goes out with” the most popular girl, the second most popular boy goes out with the second most popular girl, and so on and so forth.³¹⁹

Journalist Linda Perlstein spent a year living with middle school students in order to study the nature of romantic relationship among them. In her book *Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*, Perlstein describes that in schools, girls used not their own judgment but the opinions of their peers in selecting a guy for romantic relationships. She writes that girls would choose who they will “go out with” mostly “because the guy is

³¹⁸ Greer, Germaine (2000). The Whole Woman. New York, Anchor Books.

³¹⁹ Brown, B. Bradford, “ ‘You’re Going Out with WHO?’ Peer Group Influences on Adolescent Romantic Relationships” in Furman, Wyndol, B. Bradford Brown & Candice Feiring, eds., (1999). The Development of Romantic Relationships in Adolescence. New York, Cambridge University Press.

someone her friends would approve of. It's mostly about the superficial stuff. He's got the right look, he's got the right clothes... The asking and dumping are done through intermediaries." ³²⁰

In a study published in the year 2000 issue of the *Journal of Biosocial Science*, researchers Neville Bruce & Katherine Sanders showed that the average high school romantic relationship lasts about eleven weeks.³²¹ Such a romantic relationship may provide the worst type of preparation for a long lasting, loving relationship and for a commitment of husband and wife to stay together throughout hard times during the marital life. Unfortunately, many parents believe that such romantic relationships in adolescence provide good practice for serious relationships in adult age. They think that practice makes perfect. However, psychologists and sociologists who study romantic relationships in adolescents are reaching a different conclusion. Obviously, those adolescents are not practicing the right task.³²² Another study which supports this contention is the research of the psychologists Wyndol Furman and Elizabeth Wehner who studied romantic relationships for years. For middle and

³²⁰ Perlstein, Linda (2003). Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers. New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

³²¹ Bruce, Neville & Sanders, Katherine (2001). "Incidence and Duration of Romantic Attraction in Students Progressing from Secondary to Tertiary Education." Journal of Biosocial Science **33**: 173-184.

³²² Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

high school students, they found that “adolescents are not very concerned with the fulfillment of attachment or care giving needs.... Instead, their focus is on who they are, how attractive they are ... and *how it all looks to their peer group*.”³²³ With the passage of time, Furman and Wehner have found that “these individuals may become more skillful, but more skillful in developing the relationships they have come to expect.”

As a result of such romantic relationships, adolescents actually develop bad habits which may very well be carried through the rest of their lives in their marital lives. Explaining the findings by Furman and Wehner, Dr. Sax notes:

“Adolescents often develop bad habits in their dating relationships. A boy may get in the habit of regarding his girlfriend as a source of sexual gratification without really connecting with her as a human being. A girl may get in the habit of seeing her romantic partner as a ‘trophy boyfriend’ without any idea of how to integrate him into her life.”³²⁴

By the time those boys and girls enter into their practical adult life and it is time for a marriage that will hopefully last a life-time, they have developed different types of bad

³²³ Furman, Wyndol & Wehner, Elizabeth, “Adolescent Romantic Relationships: A Developmental Perspective” in Shulman, Shmuel & Collins, Andrew, eds., (1997). Romantic Relationships in Adolescence: Developmental Perspectives. San Francisco, Wiley. Quoted in: Sax, Leonard, MD, PhD, Why Gender Matters

³²⁴ Sax, Leonard M.D., Ph.D. (2005). Why Gender Matters: what parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences. New York, Broadway.

habits which can potentially do great harm to marital relationships. It would have been much better if they had not gotten into those teen relationships.

In most of the world's cultures, boys and girls did not used to mingle until they were of marriageable age and in many cultures there are still arranged marriages. In fact, as Joan Brumberg pointed out in *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, before 1950 in the U.S.A., parents generally would not allow their children, especially their daughters, to have courtship, dating or premarital relations with boys.³²⁵ However, with the onslaught of the media and the availability of contraceptives, the trend is changing now and the U.S. is taking the lead in terms of boys and girls having premarital relationships.

Men are Visually Aroused but Women are Not

Women often complain that men see them as “objects”. On the other hand, men complain that women are only interested in talking. Neither of them is wrong because for men, sex is an action, whereas for women it has more to do with communication and intimacy. Anne Moir alluded to this aspect of male psychology when she noted that the key perceptual sense in men is vision due to which more men than women like making love with the lights on. Pornography, which is the photographic depiction of sex seen though the eye, is primarily a male industry. Anne Moir observed:

³²⁵ Brumberg, Joan Jacobs (1997). The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls. New York, Random House.

“Women rightly complain that men see them as sex objects.... Preoccupied with shape and form from birth, it is in men’s nature that the beauty and shape of the opposite sex matters to them more than it does to women.”³²⁶

In the same vein, American anthropologist Clellan Ford and psychobiologist Frank Beach noticed the universality of human psychology across many cultures of the world. They wrote:

“In most societies the physical beauty of the female receives more explicit consideration than the handsomeness of the male. The attractiveness of the man usually depends predominantly upon his skills and prowess rather than upon his physical appearance.”³²⁷

It also appears that men are much more promiscuous than women. Recently, a group of psychologists from all over the world published a survey of more than 16,000 persons from 52 countries, including Australia, African, Japan, China, South Asia, East Asia, Europe and North and South America. When these psychologists looked at women and men across so many cultures and continents, they found “universal” gender differences in their sexual interest and motivation. The researchers of this study concluded that by their nature, men “desire larger number of sexual partners than women in every region of the world regardless of

³²⁶ Moir, Anne & Jessel, David (1991). Brain Sex: The Real Difference between Men & Women. New York, Carol Publishing Group.

³²⁷ Ford, Clellan S. & Beach, Frank A. (1951). Patterns of Sexual Behaviour. New York, Harper Row.

relationship status, sexual orientation, or whether the person is actively seeking [a partner].”³²⁸

Hence, there are psychological differences between males and females and how men look at women. This international research is yet another evidence for the importance of women to cover their beauty in the presence of unrelated (non-*mahram*) men.

Medical Benefits of Wearing the Niqab

According to the Islamic scholar Izz ud din bin Abdussalaam, the whole purpose of every injunction of Islam is to remove harm and to benefit humanity (*jalbul masaalih wa dar ul mafasid*). He wrote: "Islamic law aims to serve the interests of people and to prevent everything which adversely affects them. The achievement of what is beneficial is the pivot around which Islamic law turns: it either prevents what is harmful or enhances what is good.”³²⁹ One of the commandments of Islam is for women to cover their faces (wear niqab) when they go in public places or encounter non-*mahram* men. There are, in fact, a number of medical benefits that wearing the veil can provide to women.

³²⁸ Schmitt, David et al. (118 other authors) (2003). "Universal Sex Differences in the Desire for Sexual Variety: Tests from 52 Nations, 6 Continents, and 13 Islands" Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **85**: 85-104.

³²⁹ Abdussalaam, Izz ud din bin (died 660 A.H.) (1980) Qawaid al-ahkam fi masaleh al-an'am (edited by Taha Abdul-Ra'ouf Sacad) Dar al-Jil, Beirut,

Medical Face-Mask or “Medical-Niqab”

It is a well-known practice to wear a face mask in order to prevent respiratory infections. Wearing a face-mask is the major way of cleaning the air before one breathes it. In this respect, the Islamic face-covering or “niqab” is quite similar to the medical face-mask or better yet, the “medical-niqab”. Similar to the face-mask, the niqab cleans the air before one breathes it. In addition, the niqab also provides protection from dust particles as well as car exhaust on the roads. When we are sitting in traffic and a car in front of us gives off terrible exhaust, we instinctively shield our mouth and nose with our hands and wish to have a cloth to wrap around our face. Niqab filters out the pollutants from the air we breathe.

These days, we are told by medical authorities to wear a face-mask in the wake of various epidemics, such as the swine flu pandemic. In the “Interim Recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use to Reduce 2009 Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Transmission”, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the U.S. states: “Facemasks help stop droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. They also keep splashes or sprays from reaching the mouth and nose of the person wearing the facemask.”³³⁰

Although there is a scarcity of studies on the efficacy of face-masks, a recent study from the University of New South Wales shows that wearing facemasks can cut the

³³⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). “Interim Recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use to Reduce 2009 Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Transmission”. Atlanta, Georgia.

odds of respiratory infection by as much as 75%. The findings of this study are published in the February 2009 issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, the journal of the CDC. In this study, researchers at UNSW, Sydney's Westmead Hospital, Imperial College (London) and the National Centre for Immunization Research studied more than 280 adults in 143 families in Sydney during the winter seasons of 2006 and 2007. The adults were randomly allocated masks when exposed to a sick child in the household.³³¹ The lead author of the paper, Raina MacIntyre, is a Professor of Infectious Diseases Epidemiology and head of UNSW's School of Public Health and Community Medicine. In a press release by UNSW, Professor MacIntyre said: "We now have provided that evidence. Masks play an important role in reducing transmission if they are worn properly." "There is no effective treatment for the 90 or so common cold viruses that make families sick each winter, but masks could provide simple and effective protection," Professor MacIntyre continued.

Wearing a face mask is an easy way to boost protection from severe respiratory illnesses such as influenza and SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome). Health care professionals in the hospitals wear them precisely for this reason. As the awareness about SARS and swine flu increase in the general public, more and more people are opting to wear the face-mask in public during the cold seasons. In fact, during the height of the SARS epidemic of

³³¹ MacIntyre, C. Raina, Simon Cauchemez, Dominic E. Dwyer, et al (February 2009). "Face Mask Use and Control of Respiratory Virus Transmission in Households." Emerging Infectious Diseases. **15** (2)

April and May 2003 in Hong Kong, 76% of the population wore a face mask.³³²

Covering the face when outside the home also has many beneficial effects on the facial skin of women. There are several key differences in facial skin properties between a man and a woman. Of course, not all of these differences are necessarily applicable to all individuals. However, in general, a man's facial skin does show differences when compared to women's facial skin. Women's skin is a lot more sensitive than men's and wearing a niqab protects the female face. Here are some of the main differences in the facial skin of men and women:

Skin Thickness

Echographic studies have revealed that skin thickness is greater in men than in women. In addition, ultrasound studies have also shown that men's skin is thicker than women's skin across the entire age range of 5 to 90 years.³³³ In one study, skin thickness of forehead, cheeks and forearms was measured among men and women. The results from this study are presented in the following table³³⁴:

³³² Lo, Janice Y.C., Thomas H.F. Tsang, Yiu-Hong Leung, et al (November 2005). "Respiratory Infections during SARS Outbreak, Hong Kong, 2003." Emerging Infectious Diseases. **11** (11)

³³³ Baran, Robert & Maibach, Howard I. (2005). Textbook of Cosmetic Dermatology. Oxon (U.K.), Taylor & Francis. Pg.13

³³⁴ Tsukahara, K., Takema, Y., Moriwaki, S., Fujimura, T., Imokawa, G. (2001) "Dermal fluid translocation is an important determinant of the diurnal variation in human skin thickness." British Journal of Dermatology **145**: 590-596.

Skin Thickness	Females	Males
Forehead	1.50 mm	1.85 mm
Cheek	1.45 mm	1.85 mm
Forearm	0.90 mm	1.15 mm

Note: Table entries are skin thickness values measured in millimeters (mm). A millimeter is one-tenth of a centimeter.

It can be seen from the table that skin thickness values of forehead, cheek and forearm for males are significantly greater than for females (this difference is statistically significant). This means that women are more vulnerable to damage of the skin caused by ultraviolet rays of the sun. This is one of the main reasons why the female face suffers more from sun aging. Since a man's skin is of a harder texture, the UV rays and pollutants will not do half as much damage as they do to a woman. So, women's faces wrinkle faster and produce looser skin quicker. Wearing a niqab protects women's smooth and gentle facial skin from the damaging effects of the sun and environmental pollutants.

Skin Aging

As skin ages, its properties change. A recent study has shown that the female skin actually starts to age faster than that of men. Using a new laser imaging technique, researchers looked at the deeper layers of the skin and measured the amount of damage from sun exposure and

aging. The imaging of collagen and elastin in the skin, whose degeneration causes wrinkles and loss of smoothness, revealed that women lose collagen faster than men.³³⁵

The amount of collagen in the skin decreases to a greater extent in women than in men as individuals get older. More importantly, this is also a main reason why women, who have had similar sun exposure to men over the years, appear older than men of the same age. Wearing a niqab outside the home prevents wrinkles on the face of a woman caused by sun exposure. The skin aging process of a niqab-wearing woman will be slower compared to a woman whose facial skin is continuously exposed to rays of the sun.

Facial Hair

One of the major differences between the male and female facial skins is the fact that facial hair grow copiously on men's faces but not on women's faces. The beard offers protection to men in many ways. Growing the beard prevents a person from the diseases of the throat and the diseases of the gums.³³⁶ The beard also helps in treating chronic coughs. The beard keeps a man's face warm in cold climates, as was shown by one researcher.³³⁷ Since the hair

³³⁵ Goudarzi, Sara (03 October 2006). "A Woman's Skin Ages Faster." Health section:
http://www.livescience.com/health/061003_women_skin.html

³³⁶ Mushtaq, Gohar, Ph.D. (2003). Growing a Beard: In Light of the Qur'an, Sunnah and Modern Science. London, T-Ha Publishers Ltd.

³³⁷ "Beard Research."
<http://mudhead.uottawa.ca/~pete/beard.html>

follicles on men's face grow hair in more sebaceous glands than women, these glands are much smaller and do not absorb chemicals as quickly as women's glands do. This means that not only does men's facial hair protect them from the harmful pollutants and dust, their facial skin also does not absorb external chemicals as quickly as in the case of women. Thus, men with beards do not have to protect their faces with niqab when they go out because their beards already offer protection to their facial skin. On the other hand, not only do women's faces not have protection because of the absence of a beard, their sebaceous glands on their faces absorb chemicals more quickly. Therefore, when women leave their homes and go out, wearing a niqab will offer protection to their faces from dust, pollution and the harmful effects of weather.

Oily Skin

Even though men's facial skin contains smaller oil glands, their skin is generally more oily than women's skin. Sebaceous (oil-producing) glands in men's skin produce significantly higher amount of oil than in women's skin for age ranges 20 to over 69.³³⁸ This is primarily due to presence to the male hormone testosterone, which is responsible for the skin generating a higher amount of oil secretions. On the other hand, the female hormone estrogen results in women's skin secreting less oil. It is very likely that higher oil production in men's facial skin will result in reflecting more of the sun's rays falling on it. Women's dry facial skin will be prone to absorbing more of the sun's rays. Wearing a face veil solves this problem for women.

³³⁸ Pochi, P.E. and Strauss, J.S. (1974) "Endocrinologic control of the development and activity of the human sebaceous gland." Journal of Investigative Dermatology **62**: 191-201.

Nerve Fibers

In one scientific study, it was demonstrated that women's skin is more sensitive to small temperature changes and to pain caused by either heat or cold.³³⁹ In another study, pricking pain sensation to heat projected to the skin from a lamp was measured among men and women.³⁴⁰ The results revealed that compared to men, women's skin was more sensitive and felt more pain. Possible explanation for the differences in pain perception between the two sexes could be lesser skin thickness among women compared to men (as discussed earlier) and also more nerve fibers in women's skin compared to men's skin. Indeed, there has been some research indicating that men's skin has fewer nerve fibers (about 50% less) than women's skin. According to a report in the October issue of the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, women have more nerve receptors, which cause them to feel pain more intensely than men. In this study conducted by Bradon J. Wilhelmi, M.D., and colleagues at the Plastic Surgery Institute of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, it was found that on average, women have 34 nerve fibers per square centimeter of facial skin whereas men average just 17 nerve fibers.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Meh, D., Denislic, M. (1994) "Quantitative assessment of thermal and pain sensitivity". Journal of Neurological Science. **127**: 164-169.

³⁴⁰ Procacci, P., Bozza, G., Buzzelli, G., Della Corte, M. (1970) "The cutaneous pricking pain threshold in old age". Gerontologia Clinica. **12**: 213-218.

³⁴¹ Mowlavi, Arian (M.D.), Cooney, Damon (M.D.) Febus, Lori R.T. et al (2005). "Increased Cutaneous Nerve Fibers in Female Specimens." Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. **116**; 1407-1410.

This might explain why females seem to have greater sensitivity to skin pain. This means that women's faces experience more pain when exposed to the heat of the sun rays or warm winds during hot summer days or cold winds during winter season. Because of the fragility and sensitivity of women's facial skin, Islam (which is a mercy to mankind) has prescribed wearing a face veil to women when they leave their homes.

To sum up, covering the face with niqab when outside the home has many medically beneficial effects on the female face. In the niqab, there is protection and perfection for Muslim women.

Chapter 10

Niqab (face-veil) in Muslim Societies before Colonization

When a water fountain emerges out of a mountain, its water is crystal-clear. But on its way down to the plains and grounds, if someone changes the color of the water by adding dust and impurities to it, the people living downstream will think that this fountain water was colored originally. This analogy is as true for the veil of the Muslim woman as it is true for a polluted water fountain. Ever since the fountain of Islam emerged from the mountains of Makkah and then spread to the East and the West, the majority of Muslim women used to wear a face veil when they went out of their homes.

However, with the advent of Western imperialism in the Muslim countries starting about 200 years ago, the veil worn by Muslim women became the primary target of the colonialists. Then came the Western sexual revolution backed by the print and electronic media which eventually had its impact on Muslim societies. As a result, first the face-veil (niqab) disappeared from the faces of Muslim women, then hijab vanished from the heads of Muslim women and lastly, with the advent of blue jeans, loose clothings (*jilbaabs* or *abaayas*) were kissed good-bye by

Muslim women who wanted to imitate and adopt the Western materialistic lifestyle. Today, some modernist Muslim writers, who are used to looking at things superficially, do not believe that historically the majority of women in Muslim societies used to wear the face-veil (*niqab*). They think that the pure, colorless fountain of Islam was always muddy and colored. However, there is plenty of historical evidence which shows that the majority of Muslim women until the 18th century used to cover their faces in public. This evidence comes from the diaries and travelogues of non-Muslim visitors to Muslim countries about two centuries ago or earlier as we will see in the next section.

Colonialism and Muslim Women's Veil

Until the European imperialists invaded Muslim countries and the Muslims started mixing with non-believers, all our Muslim women walked in this world with great respect and dignity. The Europeans found it very difficult to come anywhere near the border of our Muslim sisters' purity. The niqab not only protected Muslim women from the lascivious gaze of imperialists but also gave them freedom and independence from being misused by them. The non-believers planned to destroy their barrier through removal of the Niqab and unfortunately, many of our sisters, without realizing what shame and destruction they were bringing to themselves, removed the Niqab and exposed themselves.

American social critic Neil Postman shed light on the methodology of Western colonization in his *Conscientious Objections* as he stated:

"Every age has its own special forms of imperialism.

And so does each conqueror. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the British mastered the art, their method of invasion was to send their navy, then their army, then their administrators, and finally their educational system."³⁴²

When the imperialists invaded Muslim societies, they were faced with Muslim women who would nearly all cover their faces when they went out on the streets. By the careful use of persuasion as well as modernist scholars such as Qasim Amin or Muhammad Abduh, the Europeans were able to remove Niqab from the faces of Muslim women as it will be shown in this chapter. In addition, the colonialist British with the help of the secular government of Egypt somehow managed to transform Al-Azhar University of Egypt into a modernist and apologetic institution. This was done by the appointment of modernist Muslim scholars at the key positions at the university – something which exists till this day. Such “Azharee” scholars would shave their beards or may have just French-cut type of beards, would publicly admire music (many of them consider it almost a fashion to admit that they listen to Umm Kulthum, the Egyptian songstress) and would permit free-mixing of sexes by nullifying the Islamic commandment of niqab and substituting it with a “tight-scarf” on the head which they call “hijab”. (It must be pointed out here that not all the scholars from Al-Azhar University are modernists; some of them strictly follow the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the letter. Obviously, they are not the object of discussion here.)

³⁴² Postman, Neil (1992). Conscientious Objections: Stirring up Trouble about Language, Technology and Education. New York, Vintage Books.

We shall see in this chapter that until the end of the nineteenth century, the face-veil was observed by Muslim women of all Muslim countries. Niqab was not limited to any one region. For instance, the great Muslim scholar Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi writes about the hijab of Muslim women in Islamic Empire in Spain:

وكذا عادة بلاد اندلس لا يظهر من المرأة الا عينها الواحدة

“This is the custom of the women in the country of Andalus [the Islamic empire of Spain], today – nothing is visible from a woman’s body except for one eye....”³⁴³

In this chapter, the evidence of the ubiquitous presence of the face-veil in Muslim societies before colonization will be discussed.

Evidence of Muslim Women’s Veil from European Visitors and Tourists

About two centuries ago, European visitors used to feel very frustrated upon their arrival in the Middle East because almost all of the Muslim women used to cover their faces with veils. Veiled Muslim women did not present themselves as an exhibit to the tourists. Moreover, the houses of Muslims or places of public gatherings (which used to be completely segregated at that time) did not offer any opportunity for the European visitors to look at the famed beauties of the Orient. It was a severe blow to the

³⁴³ Al-Andalusi, Abu Hayyan. Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet. (died 745 A.H. / 1344 C.E.) vol. 7, pg. 250.

popular myths among the Europeans about Muslim women. For example, French author Leon Michel wrote:

“The European man thinks that in Africa he will find beautiful palaces with a balcony over the door to the street, where a charismatic prisoner [Muslim woman] will be waiting for a brave French knight in shining body armor to rescue her. They forget that the harems are well guarded and that the *moushrabias* [screens] at the windows make it impossible to talk or even to exchange glances.”³⁴⁴

Canadian researcher Katherine Bullock points out in her book *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil* that in Europe the woman had lost her value because her face was uncovered [and hence her beauty could be enjoyed by the public]. However, because of her *niqab* (face-veil), “the Muslim woman was preserved as a spectacle, an object by those viewing her.” Therefore, in Bullock’s words, “The veil, and the women who wore it, became the metaphor for the entire East, and all that was both alluring and fearsome about it.”³⁴⁵

Since *niqab* prevented people from seeing the faces of Muslim women, some of the European travelers attacked the object (i.e. the *niqab*) which prevented them from satisfying their lustful eyes. Francis Bradley Bradley-Birt (died 1963 C.E.), in his book *Through Persia*, vented his anger on the Persian type of *niqab* by stating that it was “the most unpicturesque, ungraceful costume that the most jealous of the husbands could devise. No stranger may look

³⁴⁴ Michel, Leon (2010) Tunis [1883]. (French edition) Montana (USA), Kessinger Publishing.

³⁴⁵ Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

upon the Persian woman and see the beauty that many a poem and romance would lead one to believe lies behind those close-drawn veils.”³⁴⁶ European traveler Charles Doughty (died 1926 C.E.) disliked the *niqab* of Muslim women because it prevented him from seeing “the women’s faces, which God created for the cheerfulness of the human world.”³⁴⁷

Frustrated at being denied a look at the Muslim women without their veils, some of the European travelers used various tricks to be able to take a glance at them. For example, Mr. Dieulafoy and his wife Jane Dieulafoy traveled in Iran in the 1880s. Jane describes in her travelogue how she and her husband solved that problem:

“In the centre of a courtyard the head of the household was chatting with two young women, doubtless his relatives. Unaware that they were being observed, they had left their faces uncovered... [I hid] behind part of the wall, asked my husband to pass me the cameras, and set them up as quickly as possible, delighted to have captured such a charming interior and one so jealously guarded in Persian circles.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ Bradley-Birt, F. B. (2010) Through Persia – From the Gulf to the Caspian (original published in 1910 by J.B. Millet), New York, General Books, LLC.

³⁴⁷ Pastner, C. M. (1978). "Englishmen in Arabia: Encounters with Middle Eastern Women." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 4(2): 309-323.

³⁴⁸ Graham-Brown, Sarah. Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950 [London: Quartet Books, 1988], quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

Robert Burton (1821-1890) was an eminent British explorer whose most famous work is the account of his penetration into Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities of Muslims, by masking himself as a Muslim. In his travelogue titled *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah*, Burton did an ethnographic study of Muslims in that region. In this study, Burton did not hide his personal prejudices against Islam.³⁴⁹ Since Muslim women in the Middle East used to observe face-veil (niqab) and there used to be complete segregation of the sexes in public places, Burton had to disguise himself as a *hakim*, a Muslim dispenser of medicines, about to set out on the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca and Madina) from Cairo where Burton's account begins. Burton disguised himself as a Muslim doctor (*hakim*) because this choice of role would guarantee that Burton would meet some Muslim women, who would generally still be allowed to be seen by male doctors owing to their illness. Although Burton's whole account is filled with cynical comments about veiled Muslim women, he really had a hard time taking a look at the face of Muslim women. For example, in Medina, Burton resided in the home of a local sheikh but he admitted that he never had the opportunity to see the women of the household.³⁵⁰

Charles Doughty (1843-1926), another Englishman, made a two-year sojourn among the Bedouins of Arabia and

³⁴⁹ Burton, Sir Richard F. (1964). Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah New York, Dover Publications.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

recorded his observations in his book *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. In order to gain access to Muslim women which were all veiled when in public places, Doughty adopted the Arab name “Khalil” and took on the role of *hakim* just as his compatriot Burton did about twenty-seven years earlier. Doughty hated the institution of female segregation in society and face-veiling. He made vicious remarks about the Islamic commandment of face-veiling at various places in his travelogue. A resident of one Arabian town took Doughty to examine the eyes of his mother. The old woman would not remove the veil from her face until her son convinced her that Doughty was a *hakim*. Doughty mockingly regarded this as the initial timidity of an elderly woman in the presence of a stranger.³⁵¹ Similarly, Doughty encountered a veiled woman and sarcastically remarked that her “feminine face was blotted out by the sordid veil-clout; in our eyes, a heathenish Asiatic villany! And the gently blooded Arabian race, in the matter of the harem, are becoming churls... the women’s faces, which God created for the cheerfulness of the human world, are turned to this jealous horror.”³⁵² Commenting on the sarcastic remarks of Doughty as well as his predecessor Burton, University of Vermont anthropologist Carroll Pastner explains that Doughty and Burton “both fail to consider that one of the primary functions of the veil is to limit interaction between

³⁵¹ Doughty, Charles M. (1936). *Travels in Arabia Desert* with an introduction by T.E. Lawrence, New York, Jonathan Cape, Ltd.; first published in 1888)

³⁵² Ibid.

males and females to the immediate kin unit and to protect women from the gaze of the strangers.”³⁵³

William Rae Wilson, LL.D., the popular British traveler whose narratives of travelling in foreign countries gained much acclaim across Europe, had his journey to the Middle East published in London in 1823, under the title *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land*. In it he noted that women in Egypt are “allowed to see no other persons at home than their families or relations, and when they do appear in the streets, their faces are completely veiled.”³⁵⁴ Similarly, Margot Badran, in writing the introduction to Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawi’s autobiography notes: “When [the women] went out they veiled their faces, thus taking their seclusion with them.”³⁵⁵

What can we conclude from all these reports and travelogues? These accounts of European visitors and tourists, males and females, bear testimony to the fact that about two centuries ago, almost all Muslim women in Muslim societies used to cover their faces.

³⁵³ Pastner, C. M. (1978). "Englishmen in Arabia: Encounters with Middle Eastern Women." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 4(2): 309-323.

³⁵⁴ Wilson, William Rae (1824). Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land: With A Journey Through Turkey, Greece, The Ionian Isles, Sicily, Spain, Etc. Whitefish (Montana, U.S.A.), Kissinger Publishing, LLC. (re-published in year 2008).

³⁵⁵ Badran, Margot, 'Introduction', Harem years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924) London, Virago, 1986), quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

Breaking the Muslim Woman's Resistance by Removing Her Face-Veil

The disappearance of the veil (niqab) from the faces of Muslim women emerged along with the introduction of Western imperialism into Muslim countries. There were deep psychological reasons for this. Frantz Fanon, a French psychiatrist and philosopher, was very influential in the field of post-colonial studies and was perhaps the pre-eminent thinker of the 20th century on the psychopathology of colonization. His works have inspired anti-colonial liberation movements all over the world for more than four decades. In his pathbreaking book, *Dying Colonialism*, Fanon writes about the veil of Muslim women in Algeria during European colonization:

“Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. The occupier’s aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied ten-fold each time a new face was uncovered. Every new Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open and breached. Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haïk*, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.”³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Fanon, F. (1965). *Dying Colonialism*. New York, Grove Press, Inc. (translated from French by Haakon Chevalier)

According to Fanon, the colonialists felt victorious in their success in pressuring and persuading Muslim women to remove their veil because to the occupying forces, that meant the defense system of the Muslim society was getting weaker and weaker. The Muslim women's veil represented resistance to colonialism. She would frustrate the colonialist who felt helpless in front of a woman he considered his possession but whom he could not see. The veil obstructed possession of the Muslim women. Veiled women did not present themselves as exhibits. The colonialists arrived in the Middle East with the confidence that they were superior to the Muslims but this conviction was destabilized upon arrival in the Middle East. The European colonialists were experiencing their relation to the Algerian woman at a very complex level. How could one exercise authority over their subjects who are not known to them. For the colonialists, to bring a veiled Muslim woman out of her home was equivalent to breaking her resistance as Fanon continues:

“Unveiling this [Muslim] woman is revealing her beauty.... Hiding the face is also disguising a secret. This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.”³⁵⁷

For the women of Algeria as well as many other Muslim countries, hijab and niqab proclaimed their identity. Many secular women who demonstrated against the Shah of Iran in the late 1970s wore hijab as a sign of protest against his kingdom. The same phenomenon has been repeated in other

³⁵⁷ Fanon, F. (1965). Dying Colonialism. New York, Grove Press, Inc. (translated from French by Haakon Chevalier)

Muslim countries, such as Egypt, in the case of the Islamic Brotherhood. Egyptian thinker Safinaz Kazim, a religious feminist, was one of those Egyptian women who were initially swept away by the Western tide of modernity, which lasted for almost half a century, during which period "Western costumes symbolised high class and the veil [niqab/ face veil] was frowned on as *baladi* "(a derogatory term for "local").³⁵⁸ Safinaz Kazem considers hijab as a symbol of identity, a way of "going back to Islamic roots". She says: "There might be other reasons why many women now are wearing the veil, but there is no doubt, the spread of the Islamic costume is a sign of religiosity."³⁵⁹ Kazem was the first female Egyptian journalist to wear the veil [niqab] in the secular era of 1970s. She describes that, "we suddenly realised that we were robbed of our Islamic culture and started to look for roots. I was like an occupied plot of land and the day I took up the veil [in 1972] was the day of my liberation."³⁶⁰

Indeed, the hijab and niqab of Muslim women are the symbols of resistance to oppression till this day. In the online edition of *The Guardian*, former British nun and Christian religious scholar Karen Armstrong says: "The demand that [Muslim women] abandon the veil will ...

³⁵⁸ Shahine, Gihan (11 - 17 January 2007). A witch-hunt for our times? Al-Ahram Weekly.

³⁵⁹ Shahine, Gihan (11 - 17 January 2007). A witch-hunt for our times? Al-Ahram Weekly.

³⁶⁰ Shahine, Gihan (11 - 17 January 2007). A witch-hunt for our times? Al-Ahram Weekly.

make some women cling more fiercely to the garment that now symbolises their resistance to oppression.”³⁶¹

The European colonizers claimed that they wanted to liberate Muslim women by removing their veils. The question to ask those colonizers is: If they were so sincere to the Muslim women, why did they colonize those Muslim countries in the first place? They imposed their Western educational system upon the enslaved Muslim countries to strip Muslim women of their modesty and femininity. The primary target of Western imperialism’s religious wing, i.e. the Christian missionaries, was also Muslim mothers. Zwemer, a renowned missionary to the Middle East, claimed:

“Owing to the fact that the mother’s influence over the children, both boys and girls... is paramount, and that women are the conservative element in the defense of their faith, we believe that missionary bodies ought to lay far more emphasis in work for Moslem women as a means for hastening the evangelization of Moslem lands.”³⁶²

Some of the missionary schools in the Muslim countries went even further wherein the missionary-school teachers tried to persuade Muslim daughters to rebel against their

³⁶¹ Shahine, Gihan (11 - 17 January 2007). A witch-hunt for our times? Al-Ahram Weekly.

³⁶² Zwemer, Samuel M. (1926) Moslem Women. West Medford, Mass., Central Committee of the United Study of Foreign Missions, quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

parents and religious traditions and not wear the veil.³⁶³ Obviously, the veil of the Muslim woman and the harem was one of the biggest obstacles in their missionary work. Hence, Western imperialists considered it necessary to break the resistance of the Muslim woman by persuading her to remove her veil.

The Crusade against Niqab in the Muslim Countries

As we have read in the accounts of European visitors and tourists of the past, nearly all of the Muslim women in those societies used to cover their faces. So, what happened later which stripped the Muslim woman of her face-veil, and now after the passing of a generation or two, many Muslim women think that wearing niqab is only an exception and a supererogatory act and not a religious commandment which almost all of the Muslim women of the past societies used to observe?

Here is what happened in the Muslim lands: With the advent of Western imperialism in Muslim lands, modernist Muslim reforms started to appear in various parts of the world. Of course, we cannot completely dismiss some of those activists because some of them were sincerely struggling for women's rights in the so-called Muslim societies – where Islam was not implemented in its true spirit and women were in fact oppressed in many places.

³⁶³ Van Sommer, Annie & Samuel M. Zwemer (eds.), (1907) Our Moslem Sisters New York, The Young People's Missionary Movement, quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

Any way, in Egypt, Huda Shaarawi and Seza Nebrawi, after returning from the International Women's Alliance Conference in Rome in 1923, in a dramatic gesture, threw off their face veils after stepping off the train, while elsewhere Safiyya Zaghloul burned her niqab in a public gathering to declare the dawn of the culture of uncovered female faces in public. That was the time when Kamal Atatürk, the famous dictator of Turkey, encouraged and even forced women to adopt European dress. His wife Latife Hanim appeared with her face uncovered at their wedding and continued to participate in all public appearances without the face veil.³⁶⁴ Similarly, Queen Surraiya of Afghanistan appeared without niqab in public in 1928 while the King himself contended for the face veil's abolition.³⁶⁵ In 1936, the King of Iran, Reza Shah banned the face veil and his wives appeared unveiled in public while taxi drivers were fined if they accepted women passengers wearing niqab.³⁶⁶ In addition to compulsory unveiling of head and face in schools and elsewhere, Reza Shah ordered that no veiled woman should receive treatment at a public clinic. The desire to ape the Western dress was so strong in the Kingdom of Iran that the police was instructed by the government to shred a woman's niqab

³⁶⁴ Jayawardena, Humari (1986) Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World. London, Zed Books, quoted in Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

(face-veil) with scissors if she was caught wearing it in public.³⁶⁷

Soon thereafter, many modernist Muslim scholars also succumbed to the pressure of the media, the colonial powers and feminist Muslim women as they started issuing verdicts proposing that niqab was only limited to the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him), while Muslim women of the general Muslim society never used to wear niqab. When Britain took control of Egypt in 1882 C.E., Lord Cromer was appointed as the viceroy of Egypt (from 1883 to 1907). Cromer hired Sheikh Mohammad Abduh as the Grand Mufti of Egypt. It was during this time that Al-Azhar University, under the modernist leadership of people like Mohammad Abduh, issued the verdict making it permissible for Muslim women to uncover their faces in public (just like this institution issued various other verdicts making things permissible which are prohibited in Islam such as music, trimming the beard to the extent that it just looks like a “4 o’clock shadow”, etc.). The goal of those “apologetic scholars” of Al-Azhar University was only to please Lord Cromer.

The crusade against the face veil continues till this day in certain Muslim countries. In 1992, the Dean of a Kuwaiti School of Medicine banned women students from wearing niqab, the face veil.³⁶⁸ In Turkey, a 1988 Constitutional Court decision upheld the 1980 Dress Regulation that

³⁶⁷ Givechian, Fatemeh. (1991). "Cultural Changes in Male-Female Relations." The Iranian Journal of International Affairs 3(3): 521-530.

³⁶⁸ Goodwin, Jan. (1994) Price of Honor New York, Plume.

prohibits all female government employees from wearing headscarves and veils.³⁶⁹ Today, the whole Western-controlled media becomes furious when women are forced to cover their bodies or their faces in any Muslim country. However, the same “secular & liberal” media remains silent when Muslim women are forced to remove their veils or headscarves. Is this not a double-standard?

However, even if a person is a modernist and is not willing to accept Islamic historical documents, he/she only needs to look at the past historical travelogues of the European visitors which will conclusively tell them that just two centuries ago, it was extremely hard in the Muslim societies in the Middle East to find women on the street with their faces uncovered. All of them used to wear niqabs or face-veils. Those women understood the Islamic commandment of observing the veil much more than the present-day apologetics and modernists.

³⁶⁹ Adnan-Unat (1991) Women in Middle Eastern History eds. Nikki Keddie & Beth Baron .New Haven, Yale Univ.

Chapter 11

Liberation of Women in Islam

“Hijab is a way of giving dignity to a woman’s femininity by making her beauty unavailable for public consumption.”³⁷⁰

ISLAM IS THE BIGGEST BENEFACTOR OF WOMEN in human history. Islamic commandments of hijab provide liberation, protection and shelter to women. This has been accepted even by the Muslim feminist writers such as the Algerian novelist, translator, and female filmmaker Assia Djebar. In her book *Women of Islam*, Djebar writes:

“In the West much stress is laid on external, public life; but to the Moslem it is his private family life that is all important. The word *harem*, so cheapened abroad, so suggestive there of clandestine pleasures, is held by us in the highest honor, as the place where a man keeps his most respected and cherished possession: his wife.... And one of the most acute and most dramatic aspects [of the modern age] is the predicament of the family whose ancient tribal

³⁷⁰ Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT. This is a quote of one of Bullock’s Muslim woman friends (pg. 196).

framework has broken up. And at the center of the family is the woman. It is she who is most exposed to the storm.”³⁷¹

The veil protects a Muslim woman from the visual theft of non-mahram men. By wearing a veil, a Muslim woman negates her body in order to preserve herself from the outsider’s visual theft. This is true liberation.

Islam and Social Justice for Women

While it is true that the modernist, secular, anti-hijab mindset is a threat to Islam’s values for the sexes but a threat also comes from the other side—from unIslamic practices which are mixed with Islamic ones. Muslim women, whether they observe hijab or not, are oppressed in certain Muslim societies due to incorrect cultural applications of Islam. Many of the injustices inflicted on women in Muslim societies are due to local customs, and these practices continue because people have a hard time changing their customs or may be following of customs is more important to them than the religion itself.

When outsiders see Muslims in certain societies forcing women to wear burqas, prohibiting girls from attending schools, selling young girls off as brides to older men who are sometimes abusive and exploitative or forcing them to remain with abusive husbands, honor killings which go against the Islamic rules of evidence and divorced Muslim women suffering from child custody laws, those outsiders

³⁷¹ Djebar, Assia (1961). Women of Islam. London, Andre Deutsch, Ltd.

are naturally confused as to which of these practices are Islamic and which are an incorrect application of Islam. The outsiders are often unable—due to ignorance—to distinguish Islam (true & beneficial) from negative cultural practices (a distortion of Islam, and harmful).

Islamic teachings emphasize that Muslim women should have full access to education, a say in the political process, and access to a fair justice system. Islam values women's education as much as men's as noted earlier in the book. While women are not generally given the responsibility of earning money to support their family, all Muslims - male or female - are encouraged (even ordered) to be educated, effective members of this Ummah. Likewise, Islamic teachings stress the importance of social justice for Muslim women and men. This includes justice in domestic affairs as well. The Quran gave women marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights centuries before women in the West were granted such rights – a fact acknowledged even by Western experts of law. Noah Feldman, a law professor at Harvard University, notes:

“As for sexism, the common law long denied married women any property rights or indeed legal personality apart from their husbands. When the British applied their law to Muslims in place of Shariah, as they did in some colonies, the result was to strip married women of the property that Islamic law had always granted them — hardly progress toward equality of the sexes.”³⁷²

³⁷² Feldman, Noah (March 16, 2008). "Why Shariah?". New York Times.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/magazine/16Shariah-t.html?ei=5070&em=&en=5c1b8de536ce606f&ex=1205812800&pagewanted=all>. Retrieved Oct. 6, 2011.

Muslim women in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) generation were never wholly excluded from public life. They were also part of community life as a whole, participating in scholarship, community development, and even, at times, political issues (taking *bay'ah*) and jihad. They did all this while staying in full hijab and maintaining their chastity and modest dress, and also their primary role as wives and mothers at home. Muslim women even challenged the *khalifah* if they thought he was in error, were encouraged to get an education, participated in the most prized form of scholarship (Islamic learning), were teachers and transmitters of hadith and fiqh as it will be shown later in this book. Also, the Caliph `Umar b. al-Khattab appointed Samra bint Nuhayk al-Asadiyya as a market inspector in Makkah and Al-Shifaa bint Abdullah al-Adawiyyah as an administrator of the market in Madinah. Later, Al-Shifaa was appointed as the head of health and safety in Basrah.

Muslim women have certain rights which no one has the right to deny such as right of having full access to education, a say in the political process, and access to a fair justice system.

How can Islam prevent women from receiving fair justice? Islam is a religion which commands its believers to exercise justice even with the enemies:

"Do not let your hatred of a people incite you to aggression" (Surah al-Maidah: 2).

And Qur'an says:

"And do not let ill-will towards any folk incite you so that you swerve from dealing justly. Be just; that is nearest to heedfulness" (Surah al-Maidah: 8)

How can Islam allow groups/individuals to force women to wear burqa and punish women who don't (even though it has been shown in this book that face veil is *waajib* especially in the presence of *fitnah* or temptation)? Did Rasul Allah (peace be upon him) force people to perform every *waajib* action? No, Rasul Allah (peace be upon him) force people to perform every *waajib* action. In fact, the greatest act of virtue in Islam is the act of embracing Islam – an act which wipes away all the previous sins of a person – and yet Islam says that no one should be compelled to embrace Islam:

“*There is no compulsion in religion.*” (Surah al-Baqarah: 256)

How can Islam sanction forcing the women to remain with abusive husbands? Islam, unlike other religions, grants the wife the right to dissolve the marriage through what is known as *Khula'* (i.e. woman filing a case in the courts for a divorce process). Islam does not permit an abusive husband to chain his wife.

How can Islam prevent women from having the custody of their children in the event of divorce? It is true that in some Muslim societies women do suffer from the child custody issue, not because Islam mandates this, but because Muslim legal systems have not stayed true to Islam's teaching. In the post-colonial period in certain Muslim societies, there seems to be a general decline in Islamic scholarship and in effective, justice-promoting Islamic legal systems. Otherwise, in correctly-applied Islamic law, when a husband and wife divorce, the mother has more right to the child. Islam recognizes that the mother is more compassionate and more capable of taking care of the child

and, hence, grants the child custody right to the mother, as long as she does not remarry. There is a hadeeth in which a woman came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! (What should I do? I was there for) my son (in all ways) – my belly was for him a vessel. My lap was for him a resting place. And my breasts were for him a waterskin. Yet (now) his father claims he is taking him from me." Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) then said: "You have a greater right to him as long as you do not marry." (Musnad Ahmad; Abu Dawud)

How can Islam endorse honor killings of Muslim girls when according to the Qur'an, killing a person unjustly is the same as killing all of humanity, and saving a person is the same as saving all humanity. (See Surah al-Maidah: 32.) And Qur'an condemns female killing as follows:

"And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked. For what crime she was killed?"

(Surah At-Takwir: 8-9)

And Qur'an tells us:

"Do not take life, which Allah has made sacred, except through justice and the law. He orders this so that you may acquire wisdom"

(Surah al-An'aam: 151)

In the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and in the following pious generations, Muslim women did indeed enjoy the rights and responsibilities of hijab/niqab, and the right to financial support from their husbands or male relatives. But when we look at the holistic picture of that exemplary society, we will notice that Muslim women in the early generations (when the Ummah was in better shape than it is today) enjoyed three broad areas of rights:

- (1) the right (and responsibility) to cover properly in public and to be a homemaker,
- (2) the right to effective participation in the Ummah (through quality education, participation in scholarship, a say in political affairs (e.g., the *bay`ah*, access to and ability to criticize the Khalifah, etc), and
- (3) unobstructed access to a fair and effective justice system (Surat al-Mujaadilah, etc)

These days, all Muslims suffer from the religious, social, economic, and political decline of the Ummah, but arguably women have taken the brunt of it. In the post-colonial Muslim lands, where citizens today frequently suffer from a weakened Islamic justice system and a dearth of well-trained Islamic scholars, it is not uncommon to find communities where do not have access to decent education, do not have a say in the political process, and have little or no recourse to the justice system if their husbands or guardians mistreat them regardless of whether those women observe hijab or not. The issue of hijab is important for Muslim women but it does not solve all the social problems faced by Muslim women of the modern era. We must remember that we as Muslims are the torchbearers of the message of Islam. We have been regarded as the best nation because of our duty to enjoin the acts of righteousness and forbid the acts of disobedience to Allah as mentioned in the Qur'an: "*You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind, you enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (acts of righteousness) and forbid Al-Munkar (evil actions), and you believe in Allah.*" (Surah A'le Imran: Ayah 110). It is our duty as Muslims to raise our voices against oppression of Muslim women in the name of Islam and work towards implementing social justice for women in Muslim societies.

Does Niqab Prevent Muslim Women from Going Out in Public?

Women in Muslim societies view the veil as a means of liberation. In fact, if we look at Islamic law, a slave woman is exempt from wearing the veil as a sign that she is deprived of her autonomy and she is not a free woman.³⁷³

Historically, in the Muslim societies the veil was always regarded a symbol of a Muslim woman's liberty and freedom. The Islamic command of niqab does not prevent women from going to public places. In fact, it makes it easy for Muslim women to go out with the face veil. It must be noted here that when Islamic teachings warn against the free mixing of men and women, this does not mean the mere presence of men and women together in the public places. Islam permits women to go to public places as long as Islamic laws of hijab and niqab are not violated. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in a hadeeth: "*It is permissible for you (women) to go out for your needs.*" (Sahih Bukhari)³⁷⁴

Hanna Papanek of the University of Chicago, who has done extensive field work regarding hijab and niqab (*purdah*) systems in the regions of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh notes that Islamic *purdah* "is the *burqa* or concealing cloak worn by women. It is a logical supplement to the use of enclosed living spaces and enables women to move out of these spaces in a kind of portable seclusion. As a result, and despite its forbidding appearance, the *burqa* can be

³⁷³ Al-Misri, Ahmed ibn al-Naqib (1997). Reliance of the Traveller Amana Publishers, Beltsville, MD. Revised ed. Tr. By N. Keller

³⁷⁴ Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Book on Marriage, Chapter: Women may go out for their needs.

considered a liberating invention and is seen in this way by many women themselves. The *burqa* is an obvious social signal of the wearer's status as a secluded female, but the specific type of *burqa* worn is also a signal of class, wealth, sophistication and region of origin.”³⁷⁵

Similarly, Florence E. McCarthy, a researcher in the Department of Sociology of the Michigan State University, studied Muslim women in villages of Bangladesh. She found that both the wearing of *burqa* (hijab and face veil) and strict seclusion practices are widespread there. Many village women remembered that *burqa* was introduced in their life times as long as fifty years ago (probably due to the modern wave of Islamic revivalism and awareness of Islamic teachings) and previously *burqa* had been restricted to be used by the upper-class women in the towns. According to McCarthy, the reason of the popularity of the *burqa* among the village women of Bangladesh was their experience of increased freedom of movement outside the home.³⁷⁶

Likewise, in a study conducted on six sample villages in the Lahore district of Punjab (Pakistan), sociologists Slocum, Akhtar and Sahi studied selected sociological aspects of the life of Muslim village women. They noted:

³⁷⁵ Papanek, Hanna (1973 (Jun)). "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter." Comparative Studies in Society and History **15**(3): 289-325.

³⁷⁶ McCarthy, F. E. (1967). Bengali Village Women: Mediators between Tradition and Development. (unpublished M.A. thesis) East Lansing, Michigan State University, Department of Sociology.

“Every woman is expected to cover her head and breasts [with hijab] to show herself modest and respect worthy. A woman who does otherwise is thought immodest and vulgar. This is the usual way of observing purdah within the village. In a strict sense purdah is observed only by the women of those families which can manage their affairs without the women going out of the houses. Others may wear burqa on a visit to relatives or a trip to the city. Observation of purdah is a symbol of prestige and fashion in Punjabi villages.”³⁷⁷

In the *The New York Times* article titled “Saudis In Bikinis,” author Nicholas Kristof was frustrated to find that Saudi women were confident about wearing the veil and hijab. A Saudi dietician named Lana scolded Kristof when he wrote a sarcastic reference regarding “oppressed” Saudi women. She said to him:

"I cover up my body and my face, and I'm happy that I'm a religious girl obeying God's rules. I can swim and do sports and go to restaurants and wear what I want, but not in front of men. Why should I show my legs and breasts to men? Is that really freedom?" ³⁷⁸

Saudi women interviewed by Kristof in Riyadh “offered the same scathing critique, effectively arguing that Saudi women are the free ones -- free from sexual harassment,

³⁷⁷ Slocum, W. L., Akhtar, Jamila and Fatima Sahi, Abrar (1960). Village Life in Lahore District: A Study of Selected Sociological Aspects. Lahore: Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Punjab. p.23

³⁷⁸ Kristof, Nicholas D. (October 25, 2002). "Saudis In Bikinis." The New York Times

free from pornography, free from seeing their bodies used to market cars and colas. It is Western women, they say, who have been manipulated into becoming the toys of men.”³⁷⁹

Muslim women feel a sense of privacy and liberation when they are wearing the burqa when they go out in public. As a matter of fact, the veil imparts a sense of elevation of status to the wearer as Hanna Papanek notes:

“In one sense, of course, the experience of walking on streets where others are rendered invisible, or are depersonalized by being inside burqas is quite analogous to the experience of being a pedestrian and interacting with persons encapsulated inside cars.”³⁸⁰

Hence, for a Muslim woman who is wearing a veil, the power to see and not be seen gives her the strength of invisibility. It gives her an elevation of status by rendering her invisible to non-*mahram* men on the streets.

Benefits of Wearing Niqab

The benefits of wearing niqab (face-veil) are many, some of which are summarized as follows:

³⁷⁹ Kristof, Nicholas D. (October 25, 2002). "Saudis In Bikinis." The New York Times

³⁸⁰ Papanek, Hanna (1973 (Jun)). "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter." Comparative Studies in Society and History **15**(3): 289-325.

1) Niqab as an act of Taqwa (God-consciousness)

In the present age of secularism when even Muslims have forgotten the commandments of Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him), a woman wearing niqab has to do a spiritual jihaad (struggle) against Muslims and against her inner self. She wears niqab only to please Allah, which increases her taqwa.

2) Niqab as a manifestation of “hayaa”

The word “hayaa” is often translated into English as “shyness” but this provides a limited meaning of a rather broad Arabic term. A more comprehensive translation of its meaning could be “keeping private what should be private”. By wearing niqab, a Muslim woman asserts her right to privacy no matter where she is in society.³⁸¹

3) Niqab as a Shield against Visual Theft

A Muslim woman wearing niqab is safe in public from the “visual theft” of men and, hence, men unknown to her cannot enjoy her visually without her consent. She is hidden from prying eyes. By covering herself from head to toe, a Muslim woman regains her ability to present her physical attributes only to her family and sorority.

4) A Sense of Islamic Identity through Niqab

When a woman wears full hijab, she is not mistaken for

³⁸¹ Al-Muhajabah. “Why Wear Niqab?”
<http://www.muhajabah.com/whyniqab.htm>

anyone else except a Muslimah. Niqab is a symbol of the chastity and modesty of a Muslim woman. Perhaps this is what Allah meant when He said "...they (the covered women) should be known, as not to be annoyed..." (Surah 33:59) In addition, when such a Muslim woman goes to public places, she is in a state of perpetual da'wah (preaching). Niqab is an assertion of Islamic identity. In the words of sister Aamina Hernandez: "When wearing the niqab, we function as a 'poster board' for Islam."³⁸²

5) **Niqab as an act of obedience**

Wearing the hijab is an act of obedience to Allah and his Prophet (peace be upon him).

6) **Niqab as an act of "gheerah"**

Today, in this age of sexual revolution, virginity means nothing and male jealousy(gheerah)³⁸³ also means nothing. Niqab is meant to restore this lost moral value in society. Gheerah is a natural feeling in straight men who do not like people to look at their wives or daughters. A man whose nature is not disfigured safeguards women who are related to him from non-*mahram* men. A Muslim woman who is wearing niqab is preserving her beauty from others and shares it only with her husband. Ibn Umar reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "There are three for whom Allah has forbidden Paradise: 1) a chronic alcoholic, 2) the

³⁸² Hernandez, Aamina (2000). "Benefits of Niqab".
www.islamicwritersalliance.net.

³⁸³ It must be noted here that "gheerah" is not just for men. Women, too, should feel gheerah for their husbands – and, like men, this jealousy should be balanced and not excessive. Muslims can also feel gheerah in terms of competing with one another in good deeds; competing not to show off, but to strive to be their best for Allah's pleasure.

‘*Aaq* (one who severs ties with his parents, and 3) the *Duyooth* who agrees with the evil lewdness found in his family.’ (Musnad Ahmed)³⁸⁴

7) **Niqab stresses the unity of family**

Niqab also accentuates the unity of family bonds since women do not cover their faces in front of their non-marriageable relatives. In fact, Ursula Sharma, female anthropologist at the University of Keele (England) noted that for Muslim women, niqab “stresses the unity of the kindered vis-à-vis the outside, since it is observed only before males who are outside the trusted circle of kinsmen.”³⁸⁵

Niqab Saves Women from the Visual Theft of Men

In an article in 1994, the *Sunday Gazette Mail* (Charleston, West Virginia) reported that “women appear to be relying on the power within rather than powerful dressing without.” Commenting on this modern trend among some women of discovering the value of their modesty, Wendy Shalit writes in her book *A Return to Modesty*: “It is a respect for this ‘power within’ that once made it impossible for men to view women merely as sexual objects. Rather, women became something deeper, more elemental: possessors of a deep and wondrous secret that is revealed only to the one

³⁸⁴ Reported by Ahmad and others and authenticated by Sheikh Al-Albaani in his *Saheeh al-Jaami* (no. 3047).

³⁸⁵ Sharma, Ursula M. (June 1978). "Women and Their Affines: The Veil as a Symbol of Separation." *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 13(2): 218-233.

who proves himself deserving of her.”³⁸⁶ It is precisely the Islamic hijab and niqab which give this message to the men in the society, that a woman is not a mere sexual object and is in fact a possessor of a “deep and wondrous secret” in her veil (or burqa or chador).

A Muslim woman wearing niqab is safe in public from the “visual theft” by men and, hence, men unknown to her CANNOT enjoy her visually without her consent. She is hidden from prying eyes. By covering herself from head to toe, a Muslim woman regains her ability “to present herself as a physical being only to her family and sorority”.³⁸⁷

In fact, Islamic dress acts as a kind of “moral raincoat”, particularly useful under the inclement climate of modernity, and allows for a vision of the Islamic woman as liberated, “not from tradition and meaning, but from ostentation and from subjection to random visual rape by men.”³⁸⁸

In his classical book *Ways of Seeing*, English art critic and painter John Berger studied the female body in the history of Western paintings. In his book, Berger has aptly summarized the phenomenon of the male gaze as follows:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of

³⁸⁶ Shalit, Wendy (1999). A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue. New York, The Free Press.

³⁸⁷ Murad, Abdal Hakim (T.J. Winter) (April 1999). “Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender”. (www.masudkhan.co.uk)

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”³⁸⁹

Niqab saves a woman from this male gaze. By concealing her identity in front of non-*mahram* men, niqab prevents a woman from being turned into an object of vision. It saves the women from the de-objectifying effects of the male gaze on women. By not being observed, a woman in full *hijab* becomes immune to “internalization of the male gaze” which saves her from feelings of low self-esteem or preoccupation with appearance. Islamic hijab gives women back their personhood. As one Canadian Muslim Naheed Mustapha emphasized, Islamic *hijab* is liberating because it saves women from the tyranny of the beauty game.³⁹⁰ The beauty game refers to women’s efforts to appear like the images of the beautiful women which they see around them in glossy magazines, bill board advertisements, TV commercials, movies, and so on. By putting on Islamic hijab with long, loose clothing, Muslim women feel liberated from the “bondage of the swinging pendulum of the fashion industry and other institutions that exploit females” as pointed out by *Toronto Star* correspondent Sultana Yusufali.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Berger, John (1972) Ways of Seeing. London, Penguin.

³⁹⁰ Mustapha, Naheed, ‘My Body is my Own Business’, Globe and Mail, Facts and Arguments (Tuesday, June 29, 1993), p. C: I. quoted in: Bullock (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil.

³⁹¹ Yusufali, Sultana, ‘My Body is My Own Business’, *Toronto Star* (Tuesday, February 17, 1998), p. C: I. quoted in: Bullock (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil.

In Surah An-Noor, the Qur'an points to the phenomenon of the male gaze and it being the inroad to destruction of the heart of men. ***“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them.”*** [Surah an-Noor: 30]

The next part of this verse commands Muslim women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty and also draw their cloaks all over them. Commenting on these verses of Surah an-Noor, Canadian Muslim convert, sister Katherine Bullock rightly states: “Read together, I suggest that the Qur'an is arguing that along with lowering the gaze there is something about wearing long, loose garments that helps women protect their modesty in the face of the male gaze.”

392

Thus, the simple message of the Qur'an is that in the public sphere where there are chances of male-female interaction and, hence, exploitation of females by men, wearing an outer garment by females might alleviate this issue. In this way, Islamic hijab saves women from the visual theft of men.

Female Muslim *Shari'ah* Scholars

Islamic history is full of glittering examples of women *Shari'ah* scholars – who had mastered Islamic sciences such as exegesis of Qur'an, Hadeeth, *Seerah* (Biography of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him), Islamic Jurisprudence, history, etc. It was only by the end of the 19th

³⁹² Bullock, Katherine (2002) Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil. Virginia, IIIT.

century when the British invaded and colonized almost all Muslim countries and dismantled the Islamic educational institutions of Muslims. The British established the secular school system in those Muslim countries instead. As a consequence, for a Muslim woman to become a *Shari'ah* scholar is thought to be impossible. However, the widespread presence of female Islamic scholarship throughout Islamic history is a fact which is testified by many orientalists. For instance, Hungarian orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (1850 – 1921) in his research on hadeeth noted that nearly fifteen percent of medieval hadeeth scholars were women. In a more recent study of Muslim women scholars in Islamic history, Ruth Roded, social historian and Senior Lecturer in the History of Islam and the Middle East at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, commented:

“If U.S. and European historians feel a need to reconstruct women's history because women are invisible in the traditional sources, Islamic scholars are faced with a plethora of source material that has only begun to be studied. [. . .] In reading the biographies of thousands of Muslim women scholars, one is amazed at the evidence that contradicts the view of Muslim women as marginal, secluded, and restricted.”³⁹³

If we take a quick glance at Islamic history, we will notice that it is filled with examples of women *Shari'ah* scholars. Only a few will be mentioned here:

- Ayesha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was such a brilliant scholar of Islam that great

³⁹³ Roded, Ruth. (1994) Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who. London, Lynne Rienner.

sahabah (companions of Prophet) used to study Islam from her. She is one of the six sahabah who narrated the most number of traditions from Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). She possessed photographic memory as it is evident from the huge number of narrations she narrated from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

- Ayesha, the daughter of Saad bin Waqaas, was a great scholar of Islam and her students included jurists and scholars of hadeeth like Imam Malik and Ayub Sakhtiani. Imam Dhahbi has included her among the memorizers of the ahaadeeth.³⁹⁴
- Ayesha bint Talha was such a great scholar of Islam that she had a debate with the leading figures of the Ummayyad house and she surprised caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik by her knowledge. She was the grand daughter of Abu Bakr Siddique (the first Caliph of Islam).³⁹⁵
- The students of ‘Amara bint Abdur Rehman included Imam Zuhri, Abu Bakr bin Hazm and Yahya bin Saeed. Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz gave so much importance to the traditions of Rasool Allah (peace be upon him) narrated by her that he told Abu Bakr bin Hazm, governor of Madinah, to compile those traditions in the form of a book. Umar bin Abdul Aziz wrote: “There had not remained anyone who knew more of the ahaadeeth (Prophetic traditions) transmitted by Ayesha (the mother of the believers) than ‘Amrah.” Historian Ibn

³⁹⁴ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Ali Tahzeeb ut Tahzeeb quoted in: Hashmi, Talib ul (1992) Four Hundred Exemplary Women in Islamic History [Urdu]. Lahore, Pan Islamic Publishers.

³⁹⁵ Ibn Sa'd, Abu Abdullah Muhammad (1993). Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir. New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan. Vol. 2, part 2.

Saad has given her the title of “Aalimah” (female scholar).³⁹⁶

- One of the teachers from whom Imam Shaafi learned the knowledge of Hadeeth was Syedah Nafeesah, grand daughter of Hasan (who was grandson of Holy Prophet peace be upon him). After memorizing the Qur’an, she focused on the science of tafseer and hadeeth and soon she became an authority in these sciences. She was also famous for her piety and devotion in prayers.³⁹⁷ (Ibn Khalakaan)
- Fatima Al-Samarqandiyya – She was from the city of Halab in Syria, daughter of Ala'addin Al-Samarqandi and the wife of famous Hanafi fiqh scholar Kasani. Fatima was a great expert in Hadeeth and other religious sciences. She used to give *fataawah* (legal verdicts) from behind the veil. Imam Kasani himself used to say that his wife Fatima Al-Samarqandiyya was a greater scholar than him. Imam Kasani's students narrate: "We saw our teacher at times would leave the classroom when he could not answer a certain difficult question. After a while he would return to elucidate the answer in great detail. Only later on did we learn that he would go home to put the same question to his wife in order to hear her explanation." Clearly, he depended on his wife in his scholarly life. One of the best compilations in Hanafi fiqh is the masterpiece *Badai as-Sanai* by Imam Kasani. This book is a commentary on *Tuhfat al-Fuqaha* written by Fatima Al-Samarqandiyya's father. Many princes and rich people wanted to marry Fatima

³⁹⁶ Ibn Sa'd. Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir. Vol. 2, part 2.

³⁹⁷ Ibn Khallikan, Shams ad-Din Abu al-Abbas Wafayaat al-a'yaan quoted in: Hashmi, Talib ul (1992) Four Hundred Exemplary Women in Islamic History [Urdu]. Lahore, Pan Islamic Publishers.

but she decided to marry Imam Kasani because he was one of the greatest scholars of Hanafī fiqh. Fatima chose *Badai as-Sanai* as the *mahr* (dowry) by Imam Kasani for this marriage.³⁹⁸

- Anas Khatoon – She was the wife of the most famous commentator of Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Hafiz Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani. Anas Khatoon who was a hadeeth expert in her own right, holding *ijazas* (teaching licenses) from scholars such as Hafiz al-Iraqi. Her students include scholars such as al-Sakhawi. Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani also spoke high of his wife’s erudition and acknowledged that all the work he had done in the area of hadeeth sciences would have been impossible without the help of his wife.³⁹⁹
- Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, the spiritual and political leader of the Sokoto community in Africa, had five daughters and one of his daughters, Nana Asmaa’u, was a great poet, teacher, and Islamic scholar. Her erudition can be judged from the fact that she had written a tafseer (exegesis) of the Qur’an in many volumes.⁴⁰⁰
- Maryam Jameelah (formerly Margaret Marcos) was raised in a Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York. She accepted Islam in 1962 and then permanently immigrated to Pakistan. She has written various books

³⁹⁸ Hashmi, Talib ul (1992) Four Hundred Exemplary Women in Islamic History [Urdu]. Lahore, Pan Islamic Publishers.

³⁹⁹ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Ahmad ibn Ali (1995) Balugh al-Maraam. Introduction by: Abdul Tawwaab Muhadith Multani. Multan, Farooqi Kutub Khana.

⁴⁰⁰ Mack, Beverly B. & Boyd, Jean (2000) One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar and Scribe. Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

on Islam, which present the classical and true picture of Islam.⁴⁰¹

These are just a few examples of women Shari'ah scholars in our history. Historically, most of the women Shari'ah scholars had not written many books on Islam, however, a book is not a requirement to be a scholar of Islam. Instead, in a lot of the cases, those women had 'written' (prepared) Islamic personalities. Once the father of Sheikh Hasan Al-Banna Shaheed asked him, "Why are you not writing any book?" Upon hearing that, Sheikh Hasan Al-Banna replied to his father:

أَنَا أَصْنَفُ الرِّجَالَ وَهُمْ يُصْنَفُونَ الْكُتُبَ

"I write (prepare) personalities and they will write books."⁴⁰² That is precisely the role of many Muslim women scholars in history. Those great Muslim women wrote (prepared) the personalities of their children.

To sum up, Islam values women's education as much as men's education. While women are not generally given the responsibility of earning money to support their family, all Muslims—male or female—are encouraged (even ordered) to be educated, effective members of this Ummah. The early generations of Muslims valued education for girls, and respected female scholarship and also female participation in political affairs (women participated in bay'ah, and they were eloquent speakers who challenged

⁴⁰¹ Jameelah, Maryam (1990) At Home in Pakistan: The Tale of an American Expatriate in her adopted Country. Lahore, Mohammad Yusuf Khan & Sons.

⁴⁰² Subhaani, Inayatullah (1998) Azaan of a Mujahid (Urdu) Lahore, Islamic Publications.

the leaders with criticism and questions). In the post-colonial Muslim world, which suffers from a broad range of problems, women's education has suffered. Some conservative Muslim societies, particularly in rural, uneducated areas, while encouraging positive practices (like hijab), have also encouraged negative practices, like claiming that girls' education is unimportant or even unIslamic. As girls' education has declined in some Muslim areas, and as Islamic scholarship has declined in general, these females have seen a parallel drop in their access to a properly functioning Islamic judicial system for support in cases such as marital problems and abuse.

Western Women coming to Islam in Greater Numbers than Western Men

Today we see that, despite the media's propaganda against the hijab of Muslim women and the so-called oppression of women by Islam, western women are coming to Islam in greater number than western men. In the U.S., for every one male convert to Islam, there are 4 female converts to Islam. These educated and thinking western women have found through personal experience and observation that Islam offers true liberation to women. They have found that Islam brings dignity to the life of women by covering them in hijab.

The phenomenon of Western women embracing Islam in large numbers has been so obvious in recent decades that it has become the focus of research by several social scientists at Western universities. One of those Western social scientists is Anna Mansson McGinty, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who investigated the reasons for the appeal of Islam to women

in the West. In her 2006 book *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversions to Islam*, McGinty sheds light on how women in Islam are perceived. McGinty's interviews with the women offer a window into the journey toward conversion. McGinty found that converts were eager to wear the veil to identify themselves as Muslims, even though they also saw it as something "intimately linked to the stereotypes of Muslim women."⁴⁰³ Hence, the Islamic veil has become a powerful symbol of Islamic conversion.

According to McGinty, all of the Western women converts found something in Islam that aligned to a core part of their personality. Indeed, some of the women, according to McGinty, found that Islam allowed them to try out "a new kind of femininity", one that emphasized modesty and placed high value on who a woman is rather than what she looks like.⁴⁰⁴

One of the women interviewed by McGinty in her book was Fatima, a former Catholic who later became atheist while studying in college. Later on, she married and had two children. Once she watched a documentary on nuclear holocaust which prompted her to search for spiritual meaning in her life. During her quest, she divorced her husband and converted to Islam. Later, she married a Muslim man.

Another woman interviewed by McGinty was Mariam, an American graduate student in anthropology. Mariam went

⁴⁰³ McGinty, Anna Mansson (2006) *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversions to Islam*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

for anthropology field work in northern Africa where she embraced Islam at the age of 25. Many years later, she married a man who was also a convert to Islam.

Helena Benauoda is amongst Sweden's most high-profile converts to Islam. She is the chairwoman of the Swedish Muslim council. In one interview to the Swedish newspaper *The Local*, she recalled that her journey towards Islam started from a very young age: "It started when I was 9 and wanted to perform evening prayers but did not know who to pray to, so I started looking for answers, and found all the logical answers in Islam."⁴⁰⁵ Benauoda explained the reasons for conversion in the West: "Many people here in Sweden are looking for a spiritual meaning of life. Even those who are against religion find themselves drawn towards it, once they start studying it. But in general people here fear religion, because they fear death, and the fact that several religions deem people accountable for actions in the afterlife."⁴⁰⁶

Another comprehensive study on the phenomenon of Western women's conversion to Islam was compiled by anthropologist Darin van Nieuwkerk from University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Her book *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West* includes research on gender and conversion to Islam by leading

⁴⁰⁵ Abdelrahman, Rami (Oct. 23, 2007). "In a secular society, Swedish women who convert to Islam." *The Local* (Sweden's English Newspaper). Quoted in: <http://headscarf.wordpress.com/2007/10/23/in-a-secular-society-swedish-women-who-convert-to-islam/>

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

Western historians, sociologists, anthropologists and theologians investigating why non-Muslim women in the U.S.A., several European countries and South Africa are converting to Islam. The authors of the study found that the factors include “an attraction to Islam's high regard for family and community, its strict moral and ethical standards, and the rationality and spirituality of its theology, as well as a disillusionment with Christianity and with the unrestrained sexuality of so much of Western culture.”⁴⁰⁷

This analysis is essentially confirmed by another groundbreaking study on the conversion phenomenon, from the perspective of the sociology of religions conducted by social scientist Madeleine Sultán Sjöqvist. Her doctoral thesis at Uppsala University was “*Vi blev muslimer*” (We became Muslims) and its focus was Swedish female converts to Islam. In the abstract of this thesis, Sultán Sjöqvist writes:

“The material of the thesis consists of interviews of Swedish women who have converted to Islam, with the aim of gaining knowledge as to how the informants create meaning around their religiosity. Questions have been asked about how the women understand their conversion and their religious involvement as well as what it means to live as a convert in a secularised western society.”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Nieuwkerk, Karin van (2006) Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West. Texas, Univ. of Texas Press.

⁴⁰⁸ Sultán Sjöqvist, Madeleine (2006) Vi blev muslimer Svenska kvinnor berättar. En religionssociologisk studie om konversionsberättelser. Uppsala: ACTA Universitatis Upsaliensis (Theses from Uppsala University, Department of Theology, Sociology of Religions)

For her thesis work, Sultán Sjöqvist interviewed (ethnically) Swedish women who had converted into Islam. All the women interviewed were practicing religious Muslims. At the time of the interviews, her informants were 20–50 years old; they were married, or had been married, to Muslim men, both secular and practicing. Several of them had been divorced once or more. Their educational backgrounds varied: some had not finished their basic education, while others had studied at university level. Some had been working outside the home, while others were housewives.

According to Sultán Sjöqvist, many convert Muslim women make open interpretations of what religious commitment means, at the same time as they are searching for the ‘right answers’. The converts told her that they are liberated as women as they feel freed from society’s fixation on appearance. The converts emphasized equality and justice between the sexes, while at the same time they argued that “women should obey their husbands and live properly according to Islam.”⁴⁰⁹

In the précis of her thesis, Sultán Sjöqvist notes about Western women converts:

“They convert to protest against the fixation with looks in our modern society. The tougher living conditions for women, who are supposed to both have a career and do the housekeeping, play a part, too. Many of the women feel that their lives lack a sense of purpose, but that Christianity does not seem like a relevant alternative to them....

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

The attraction of the Islamic family life seems to be a common feature among women converts.”⁴¹⁰

In a separate article written for the Nordic Gender Institute, Sultán Sjöqvist explained the Western women converts' critical views of Western society in the following words:

“In Western society women are forced to run between home, day-care, school and working life. Combining a functioning everyday life with two working careers is seen as impossible; it is simply unfeasible to achieve a happy marriage and healthy children if both parents are forced to work outside the home. Furthermore, Western women are considered to be fixated on their looks and their bodies are seen as sexualized. The negative effects of life in Western society are obvious: women are stressed, burnt-out and ill. They become shattered and must give up their children. Western men are perceived as being more interested in their own hobbies such as sports and alcohol than in thinking about the well-being of their families.... Among Muslims, a woman's tasks in the home are valued as highly as a man's occupation. For the first time in their lives, they feel free.”⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Sultán Sjöqvist, Madeleine (2007). "In a secular society, Swedish women who convert to Islam." NIKK magasin 2: Nordic Gender Institute, Oslo, Norway
<http://www.nikk.uio.no/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=600>

Chapter 12

Stories of Women turning to Hijab & Niqab

THE PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER is to listen to the voices of some Muslim women about their understanding of, and experiences with, the veil. These stories and interviews of Muslim women wearing the hijab will show us that veiling is not a sign of male domination as is often wrongly perceived by Westerners but, is, in fact, a liberating force for many Muslim women as has been shown in the previous chapters.

The Return of Hijab

Despite the Western media's onslaughts against the veil, today more and more Muslim women from every social group, whether rich or poor, are observing hijab. A century ago, it seemed that hijab was on the way out in the Muslim world but the tide is turning now with an increasing number of Muslim girls and women seen in complete hijab. Interestingly, it is the Muslim youth who are spearheading this Islamic revivalism. On top of this, it is a paradox that this wave of Islamic revivalism amongst the youth is most prominent in Muslim countries that were forcefully modernized according to Western standards. This is beautifully elucidated by Professor John Esposito in his book *Islam: The Straight Path* as he writes:

“The history of modern Islam has challenged many presuppositions and expectations. The prevailing wisdom was that modernization required the separation of religion from public life, as modernizing societies progressively and inevitably became secularized.... Islamic revivalism... has countered and discredited such a uniform, evolutionary view of historical change and development. Revivalism has been most visible in countries where modernism had been strongest. Moreover, technology and modern education have often been used to reinforce rather than undermine belief and practice.”⁴¹²

This phenomenon of the return of hijab is observed in Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike. Dr. Malik Badri, renowned Sudanese Muslim clinical psychologist vividly recalls that when he was doing his Ph.D. in England back in 1959, he used to see “many of the wives of my Muslim friends cast off their Islamic hijab of long robes and head or face cover to wear Western style dress. They felt at the time that everybody in the street would be astonished and see them as being strangely dressed, backward or reactionary.” However, today with the emerging wave of Islamic revival, Muslims are no longer apologetic before the modernists. Dr. Badri says: “Nowadays, thanks to Islamic revivalism, nobody in London’s Oxford Street would be amused to see fully-covered Muslim women.”⁴¹³

⁴¹² Esposito, John L. (1988) Islam: The Straight Path. New York, Oxford Univ. Press.

⁴¹³ Badri, Malik (1997). The AIDS Crisis: An Islamic Socio-Culture Perspective. Kaula Lumpur, International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization.

In 1995, when the United Nations held its Fourth World Conference in Beijing, a group of lesbians, knowing that Islam was their real enemy, gathered around a tent of Arab and North African Muslim women and chanted aggressive slogans against Islam, while seductively dancing and singing pro-lesbian songs. As a result, Muslim women from Malaysia spoke out against the lesbians and said that this indecent insult “is reminiscent of the orientalist/colonialist insistence at liberating Muslim women by tearing their veils.” (the Malaysian daily *The Sun*, Sept. 9, 1995) The Muslim women of Malaysia reminded the West that “today Muslims who are veiled include doctors, lawyers and professors. This should not come as a surprise because Islam does not oppress women.”⁴¹⁴ (*The Sun*, Sept. 9, 1995)

Recently, Reuters published its news report (Nov. 2nd, 2009) with the title “Battle over face veil brewing in Egypt”. After making sarcastic remarks about the practice of face-veiling in Islam, it was admitted in the Reuters report that the niqab has become more prevalent in the last few years in Egypt:

“Just 30 years ago, women attended Egypt’s flagship Cairo University wearing miniskirts and sleeveless tops. They strolled along the beaches of Alexandria in skimpy swimsuits at a time when society was seemingly more liberal and tolerant.

Analysts say the headscarf, or hijab, was seen as a status indicator and was prevalent among lower-income classes. Women from upper and middle classes rarely veiled at a young age and those who did usually followed fashionable interpretations of hijab. The niqab was uncommon at that time.

⁴¹⁴ *The Sun* (the Malaysian daily), Sept. 9, 1995. Petaling Jaya (Kualalampur), Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd.

But the niqab has become more prevalent. Women in flowing black robes are a common sight strolling through Egypt's fanciest shopping malls and five-star hotels, as well as in shanties.”⁴¹⁵

Egypt is not the only Muslim country which is witnessing the return of the hijab. As mentioned earlier, burqa has become very popular among the village women of Bangladesh. The same has been observed in Pakistan as noted earlier in the sociological study by Slocum, Akhtar and Sahi.

Times magazine published a report about the wave of Islamic awakening among the youth in Pakistan in its Oct. 16th, 2006 issue. The author of the article described the atmosphere of Punjab University of Pakistan in the following words:

“Walk around the leafy-green 1,800-acre campus, and you will encounter nothing that resembles frivolous undergraduate behavior. Musical concerts are banned, and men and women are segregated in the dining halls. Many female students attend class wearing headscarves that cover everything but their eyes..... What’s most striking about that climate of conservatism is that it is being driven not by faculty but by students.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Karouny, Mariam (Nov. 2nd, 2009) Reuters (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/11/02/us-egypt-niqab-idUSTRE59U17V20091102>) Retrieved on: April 24th, 2011.

⁴¹⁶ Baker, Aryan (Lahore) (Oct. 16, 2006). "No Dates, No Dancing: Why Pakistan's university students are embracing the fundamentalist life." Time U.S.A.: 53-54.

At the Punjab University, Jamiat-e-Talab (I.J.T.) is the biggest student group on campus, having influence not just on the student life-style but also on curriculum and course syllabi. Baker continues:

“A visit to Punjab University reveals what that means in practice. About 2,400 of the university’s 24,000 students belong to I.J.T. Members are expected to live morally and to abide by the Koran’s injunction to spread good and suppress evil. For many, that involves adopting an austere lifestyle. Members meet for regular study sessions and must attend all-night prayer meetings at least once a month. Outside the classroom, complete segregation of the genders is strictly observed.”⁴¹⁷

Likewise, M. H. Lakdawala from Mumbai reported in the February 2001 issue of the *Islamic Voice* monthly of India that “from parental pressure to peer pressure to self-choice, Purdah, Hijab or Burqa has come full circle” and today hijab is increasingly being seen as an “ideal costume and a social leveler by Mumbai girls.”⁴¹⁸ According to Lakdawala, today hijaab is becoming a fashion statement for the new generation. To support his contention, Lakdawala interviewed and reported the experiences of some Muslim girls from Mumbai which will be summarized here.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Lakdawala, M.H. (Feb. 2001). “Hijab is Back in Mumbai”. Islamic Voice. Mumbai: Vol. 15-02 (170).

⁴¹⁹ Lakdawala, M.H. (Feb. 2001). “Hijab is Back in Mumbai”. Islamic Voice. Mumbai: Vol. 15-02 (170).

Unaiza – Third year student, Maharashtra College

“Eve-teasing (sexual harassment) is not a new concept and most certainly, every girl at some point in time has been victim to it. That’s where the hijab comes to the rescue.”

Kavita – Hindu Classmate of Zeenat Baig

Zeenat Baig is a Management student and the only Muslim in her class. Her classmates used to tease her as orthodox. When she explained the advantages of face-veil to her classmates, their attitude towards Zeenat changed completely. Kavita, a classmate and friend of Zeenat told her of her observation that most men are very courteous to women in hijab. Despite being a Hindu, Kavita admitted that if she were given an option, she would wear the face veil, only so that she can walk on the street without having to worry about sexual harassment.

Tabbassum - Tibbia Unani Medical College

“The veil has connotations that ward off male attention. It signifies a certain sense of security, maybe the girl’s father or brother is around, is a thought that would come to mind.”

Yasmin Sayed – Burhani College

“It’s pure psychology. If a man cannot see the face, he would not risk making a pass; just in case the seemingly delicate girl turns out to be an old lady, his nightmare would come alive.”

Shahnaz – Post graduate Student, Mumbai University

Shahnaz told the interviewer that beside the safety aspect, the hijab can also reduce the difference between the haves and the have-nots: “Who can tell that the dress beneath is worth ten thousand or a mere hundred?”

Farhana – Post graduate Student, Mumbai University

Farhana observed that one advantage of outer-garments is that our (inner) clothes do not get dirty and no one can tell how many times we have repeated our favorite dress.

Rabia – Post graduate Student, Mumbai University

Rabia, who wears the burqa (long gown with face-veil), points out that it protects one from the ultra-violet rays of the sun: “This is the perfect solution to pollution and tanning. No more greasy or ineffective sun-screens.”

In the last two centuries, Muslims suffered a lot of inferiority complexes during the age of Western colonial rule in Muslim lands. Today, there is an emerging wave of religious awareness among Muslim youth. Those Muslim youth do not suffer from the inferiority complex which inflicted their Muslim due to colonialism or post-colonial trauma. Today, the hijab and niqab are observed by an increasing number of Muslim girls. The modern era is witnessing the return of the hijab and niqab.

The Story of Sister Tara Blackthorn

Sister Tara Blackthorn embraced Islam at the age of 17. She is a Catholic convert to Islam. She has shared the story of her conversion to Islam and adopting niqab:

“This is my niqab story. I had accepted Islam during the beginning of my 11th grade school year. Before taking shahadah I had adopted wearing a jilbaab and hijab. One of my Muslim friends enlightened me on the evidence of niqab. She had said that there were two scholarly views based on its *daleel* (proof), however the practice of niqab

was the safer choice, so I decided that the day after school lets out that year, I will Insha Allah start to wear niqab. Then I started asking myself, why I was waiting until the summer vacation, was I that scared to face my peers at school with the niqab? I had already shocked everybody with jilbaab and hijab, I just didn't want to deal with their stares and hushed comments. I became scared that I was committing shirk by putting the opinions of my schoolmates before that of Allah. Also, I was very scared of taking the subway in my niqab, I already received murderous stares from various pairs of eyes.

The next Jumu'ah prayer that I attended, Alhamdulillah, the imam was talking about the amount of time we have in this life and suddenly I became restless. I seriously started to think about the waiting period that I had set up for my self to start the niqab, and was it the right thing to do. I can't be sure if I will live until school ends. (This thought was triggered by the unfortunate event that had occurred earlier that year, my childhood friend had died in a car accident and I was a bit sensitive about death during the Jumu'ah). I made up my mind that from that Saturday, I will be wearing my khimar a little bit differently, with only my eyes showing. I am still wearing the niqab and I have not regretted my decision. For those of you who live in New York City and know the state of their public transportation system, I hope it gives you strength to start your own niqab by knowing that I take the subway (train) and sometimes the bus at least 5 times a week in my niqab. Whenever I take the subway, I remind myself of the hadeeth that says that if the whole world wanted to harm you, they wouldn't be able to, unless Allah willed it. May Allah raise your Imaan and

reward in the Hereafter.”⁴²⁰

How I Came to Love the Veil – Yvonne Ridley

Yvonne Ridley is an award-winning journalist of more than 25 years standing and author of two books, *In The Hands of the Taliban* and *Ticket to Paradise*. She has spent the last 10 years working for several prestigious Fleet Street newspapers including *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Independent* and *The Sunday Express*. She has also worked into television and radio producing several documentaries from Iraq and Afghanistan. In one of her articles, Ridley has explained very eloquently how she came to love the veil, which will be briefly quoted here:

“POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS just love to write about the oppression of women in Islam ... without even talking to the females beneath the veil.

They simply have no idea how Muslim women are protected and respected within the Islamic framework which was built more than 1400 years ago....

I used to look at veiled women as quiet, oppressed creatures and now I look at them as multi-skilled, multi-talented, resilient women whose brand of sisterhood makes Western feminism pale into insignificance. My views changed after the truly terrifying experience of being arrested by the

⁴²⁰ Blackthorn, Tara. “My Niqab Story”

http://www.muslimconverts.com/hijab_niqab/niqab_tara.htm

Taliban for sneaking into Afghanistan in September 2001 wearing the burqa.

During my 10-day captivity I struck a deal that if they let me go I would read the Qur'an and study Islam. Against all the odds, it worked and I was released. In return I kept my word but as a journalist covering the Middle East I realized I needed to expand my knowledge of a religion which was clearly a way of life.

And no, I'm not a victim of Stockholm Syndrome. To be a victim you have to bond with your captors. During my imprisonment I spat, swore, cursed and abused my jailers as well as refusing their food and going on hunger strike. I don't know who was happier when I was released - them or me!

Reading the Qur'an was, I thought, going to be a very simple academic exercise. I was stunned to discover that it clearly stated women are equal in spirituality, education and worth. A woman's gift for child birth and child-rearing is very much recognised as a quality and attribute. Muslim women say with pride they are homemakers and housewives....

With Islam, choosing to remain at home and raise children takes on a new dignity and respect in my eyes, similar to those sisters among us who choose to go out to work and have careers and professions.

I then began looking at inheritance, tax, property and divorce laws. This is where Hollywood divorce lawyers probably get their inspiration from. For instance, the

woman gets to keep what she earns and owns while the man has to stump up half his worth.

Isn't it funny the way the tabloid media gets very excited over the prospect of some pop or film stars pre-nuptial wedding agreement? Muslim women have had wedding contracts from day one. They can choose if they want to work or not and anything they earn is theirs to spend while the husband has to pay for all the household bills and the upkeep of his family.

Just about everything that feminists strived for in the 70s was already available to Muslim women 1400 years ago.

As I said, Islam dignifies and brings respect to motherhood and being a wife. If you want to stay at home, stay at home. It is a great honor to be a home maker and the first educator of your children.

But equally, the Qur'an states if you want to work, then work. Be a career woman, learn a profession. Become a politician. Be what you want to be and excel in what you do as a Muslim because everything you do is in praise of Allah (swt).

There is an excessive, almost irritating concentration or focus on the issue of Muslim women's dress particularly by men (both Muslim and non-Muslim).

Yes, it is an obligation for Muslim women to dress modestly but, in addition, there are many other important issues which concern Muslim women today.

And yet everyone obsesses over the hijab. Look, it is part of my business suit. This tells you I am a Muslim and therefore I expect to be treated with respect.

Can you imagine if someone told a Wall Street executive or Washington banker to put on a t-shirt and jeans? He would tell you his business suit defines him during work hours, marks him out to be treated seriously.

And yet in Britain we have had the former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw describing the nikab - the face veil revealing only the eyes - as an unwelcome barrier. When, oh when, will men learn to keep their mouths shut over a woman's wardrobe?

We also had Government Ministers Gordon Brown and John Reid express disparaging remarks about the nikab - both these men come from over the Scottish Borders where men wear skirts!!

Then we had a series of other parliamentarians enter the fray describing the nikab as a barrier for communication. What a load of nonsense. If this was the case can anyone explain to me why cell phones, landlines, emails, text messaging and fax machines are in daily use? Who listens to the radio? No one switches off the wireless because they can not see the face of the presenter.

The majority of sisters I know who choose to wear the nikab are actually white, Western reverts who no longer want the unwelcome attention of those few leering men who will try and confront females and launch into inappropriate behavior. Mind you, there are a couple of London sisters I

know who say they wear the nikab at anti-war marches because they can't stand the smell of spliffs.

I am afraid Islamophobia has become the last refuge of the racist scoundrel. But the cowardly, chauvinistic attacks launched - largely by men - are unacceptable to Muslimahs as well as their secular, female sisters from the left.

I was a feminist for many years and now, as an Islamic feminist, I still promote womens' rights. The only difference is Muslim feminists are more radical than their secular counterparts. We all hate those ghastly beauty pageants, and tried to stop laughing when the emergence of Miss Afghanistan in bikini was hailed as a giant leap for women's liberation in Afghanistan.

I've been back to Afghanistan many times and I can tell you there are no career women emerging from the rubble in Kabul. My Afghan sisters say they wish the West would drop its obsession with the burka. "Don't try turning me into a career woman, get my husband a job first. Show me how I can send my children to school without fear of them being kidnapped. Give me security and bread on the table," one sister told me.

Young feminist Muslimahs see the hijab and the nikab as political symbols as well as a religious requirement. Some say it is their way of showing the world they reject the excesses of Western lifestyles such as binge drinking, casual sex, drug-taking etc.

Superiority in Islam is accomplished through piety, not beauty, wealth, power, position or sex.

Now you tell me what is more liberating. Being judged on the length of your skirt and the size of your cosmetically enhanced breasts, or being judged on your character, mind and intelligence?

Glossy magazines tell us as women that unless we are tall, slim and beautiful we will be unloved and unwanted. The pressure on teenage magazine readers to have a boyfriend is almost obscene.

Islam tells me that I have a right to an education and it is my duty to go out and seek knowledge whether I am single or married.”⁴²¹

A View through the Hijab – Impressions of a Japanese Convert to Islam

Nakata Khaula, who is Japanese, embraced Islam in January 1991 while in France, one month after her first encounter with it. In her book *A View through the Hijab* as well as her oft-quoted articles, she has described her journey from a headscarf to niqab after accepting Islam.

After embracing Islam, initially Khaula started wearing the headscarf. As a Japanese woman residing in a foreign country (France), she felt uneasy in public places. Hence, with the scarf on, she felt somewhat protected from the impolite stares. Then, she returned back home. She kept on observing five daily prayers and wearing the scarf in a small Japanese town. It was certainly a test of her faith, with no

⁴²¹ Ridley, Yvonne (Tuesday, 31 October, 2006) yvonneridley.org (<http://yvonneridley.org/yvonne-ridley/articles/how-i-came-to-love-the-veil.html>)

Muslim in that town. The next step came. She realized that in public, Islam prohibits women from wearing clothes which reveal the shape of their bodies. Therefore, she started wearing loose clothes.

Six months after her conversion, Khaula traveled to Egypt. There she was surprised to learn that her hostess was covered in black from head to toe, including her face when she went out in public. "At that time my Islamic knowledge was very limited and I believed that covering the face stemmed from ethnic tradition, having no foundation within Islam," recalled Khaula. However, Khaula sewed a long black dress and a long headcover "khimar". Most of the Egyptian sisters with whom Khaula stayed firmly believed that covering the face was part of their religious duty but they did not force Khaula and left it to her choice. Although those sisters who veiled constituted only a small portion within the multicultural and secularized city of Cairo, Khaula made one interesting observation:

"Average westernized Egyptians kept their distance from the covered Muslim women, calling them 'al-akhawaat' ('the sisters'). Yet at the same time, men treated them with special respect and politeness. These 'sisters' seemed also to share a special bond. Generally speaking, the women who completely veiled were more conscientious of their belief. Those who wore simple scarves or none at all appeared unconcerned with their religious obligation."⁴²²

Soon afterwards she returned to Japan. Three months later she accompanied her husband to Saudi Arabia where he got employment. Since Khaula was already curious as to how

⁴²² Nakata, Khaula (1994) A View Through The Hijab. Jeddah, Abul-Qasim Publishing House.

would she feel behind the face veil, she prepared a small black facecover (niqab). She hence described her view through the *hijab*:

“Previously I had wondered how easily sisters could breathe under a veil. It seemed to be a matter of habit; once accustomed to it, there was no inconvenience. The first time I wore the *niqab* I felt nice, in fact extremely wonderful, as if I had become a special person. I felt like the owner of a masterpiece who enjoyed its secret pleasure. I had a treasure which no one knew about and which strangers were not allowed to see.... Thus, I have experienced the *hijab* from its simplest to its complete form.”⁴²³

Why I Shed Bikini for Niqab: The New Symbol for Women’s Liberation

Sara Bokker was raised as a Christian and is a former actress/model/fitness instructor. Currently, Sara is Director of Communications at "The March for Justice," a co-founder of "The Global Sisters Network." When she embraced Islam after the events of September 11, 2001, many of her admirers were shocked. In the following lines, Sara Bokker has described her journey from bikini to niqab:

“I am an American woman who was born in the midst of America's "Heartland." I grew up, just like any other girl, being fixated with the glamour of life in "the big city." Eventually, I moved to Florida and on to South Beach of Miami, a hotspot for those seeking the "glamorous life"....

⁴²³ Ibid.

As the gap continued to progressively widen between my self-fulfillment and lifestyle, I sought refuge in escapes from alcohol and parties to meditation, activism, and alternative religions, only to have the little gap widen to what seemed like a valley. I eventually realized it all was merely a pain killer rather than an effective remedy.

By now it was September 11, 2001. As I witnessed the ensuing barrage on Islam, Islamic values and culture, and the infamous declaration of the "new crusade," I started to notice something called Islam. Up until that point, all I had associated with Islam was women covered in "tents," wife beaters, harems, and a world of terrorism....

One day I came across a book that is negatively stereotyped in the West--The Holy Qur'an....I found the Qur'an to be a very insightful address to heart and soul without the need for an interpreter or pastor.

Eventually I hit a moment of truth: my new-found self-fulfilling activism was nothing more than merely embracing a faith called Islam where I could live in peace as a "functional" Muslim.

I bought a beautiful long gown and head cover resembling the Muslim woman's dress code and I walked down the same streets and neighborhoods where only days earlier I had walked in my shorts, bikini, or "elegant" western business attire. Although the people, the faces, and the shops were all the same, one thing was remarkably distinct--I was not--nor was the peace at being a woman I experienced for the very first time. I felt as if the chains had been broken and I was finally free. I was delighted with the new looks of wonder on people's faces in place of the looks of a hunter watching his prey I had once sought. Suddenly

a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I no longer spent all my time consumed with shopping, makeup, getting my hair done, and working out. Finally, I was free....

While content with Hijab I became curious about Niqab, seeing an increasing number of Muslim women in it. I asked my Muslim husband, whom I married after I reverted to Islam, whether I should wear Niqab or just settle for the Hijab I was already wearing. My husband simply advised me that he believes Hijab is mandatory in Islam while Niqab is not. At the time, my Hijab consisted of head scarf that covered all my hair except for my face, and a loose long black gown called "Abaya" that covered all my body from neck to toe.

A year-and-a-half passed, and I told my husband I wanted to wear Niqab. My reason, this time, was that I felt it would be more pleasing to Allah, the Creator, increasing my feeling of peace at being more modest. He supported my decision and took me to buy an "Isdaal," a loose black gown that covers from head to toe, and Niqab, which covers all my head and face except for my eyes.

Soon enough, news started breaking about politicians, Vatican clergymen, libertarians, and so-called human rights and freedom activists condemning Hijab at times, and Niqab at others as being oppressive to women, an obstacle to social integration, and more recently, as an Egyptian official called it--"a sign of backwardness."

I find it to be a blatant hypocrisy when Western governments and so-called human rights groups rush to defend woman's rights when some governments impose a certain dress code on women, yet such "freedom fighters"

look the other way when women are being deprived of their rights, work, and education just because they choose to exercise their right to wear Niqab or Hijab. Today, women in Hijab or Niqab are being increasingly barred from work and education not only under totalitarian regimes such as in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, but also in Western democracies such as France, Holland, and Britain.

Today I am still a feminist, but a Muslim feminist, who calls on Muslim women to assume their responsibilities in providing all the support they can for their husbands to be good Muslims. To raise their children as upright Muslims so they may be beacons of light for all humanity once again. To enjoin good – any good – and to forbid evil – any evil and to speak righteousness and to speak up against all ills. To fight for our right to wear Niqab or Hijab and to please our Creator whichever way we chose. But just as importantly to carry our experience with Niqab or Hijab to fellow women who may never have had the chance to understand what wearing Niqab or Hijab means to us and why do we, so dearly, embrace it.

Most of the women I know wearing Niqab are Western reverts, some of whom are not even married. Others wear Niqab without full support of either family or surroundings. What we all have in common is that it is the personal choice of each and every one of us, which none of us is willing to surrender....

I couldn't be happier to shed my bikini in South Beach and the "glamorous" Western lifestyle to live in peace with my Creator and enjoy living among fellow humans as a worthy person. It is why I choose to wear Niqab, and why I will die

defending my inalienable right to wear it. **Today, Niqab is the new symbol of woman's liberation.**

To women who surrender to the ugly stereotype against the Islamic modesty of Hijab, I say: You don't know what you are missing.”⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Bokker, Sara (Jan. 10, 2007) “Why I Shed Bikini for Niqab: The New Symbol for Women’s Liberation” (<http://www.albalagh.net/women/0097.shtml>)

Chapter 13

Closing Remarks

“It is not the eyes of a woman in purdah but the anxious darkly circled eyes of a girl with anorexia nervosa -- the woman trapped inside -- that needs to be liberated from the invisible cultural confines of the west. The Burqa and the bikini represent opposite ends of the spectrum. We need to find out which one actually exerts a noose-like grip on the psyche, social and physical health of girls and women before jeering at others or internationalising our values.”

Abid Ullah Jan (Canadian Journalist)⁴²⁵

NOW THAT THIS BOOK has reached its completion, it is hoped that the arguments presented to the readers from the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions and modern scientific research will all prove that the social system of Islam is superior to any other social system. Islamic teachings, correctly applied, never oppress women. In fact, Islam is the most women-friendly religion on this planet. In Islam, women have a constructive role to play in society. The liberation of women in Islam is far superior to Western liberation as it allows women to live with respect, dignity and equality in society. A truly liberated woman always dresses decently and modestly. Hijab empowers Muslim women by making their identities distinct, allowing them to take control of their bodies and protecting their modesty. No woman is truly liberated if she is the target of male gaze or exploitation in the society. The true Islamic hijab gives an aura of freedom to womankind, facilitating their movement

⁴²⁵ Jan, Abid Ullah “The Choice between Burqa or Bikini”
(<http://www.allaahuakbar.net/womens>)

and protecting them from provocation and the wanton greed of human wolves. Removal of the hijab makes them vulnerable to the lust of men in the society. If we look at the glossy cover of any magazine or advertisements on TV and newspaper, we will find that most of these advertisements have scantily dressed women in alluring poses to attract the attention of men. This is not liberation but degradation of women. It shows that Western society considers woman to be a sex symbol.

Today the Western media is very quick to condemn Islamic laws, which protect purity of purpose and the intermingling of the sexes at all levels of society, outside the family. The Islamic approach to dealing with vice and corruption in society is to nip the evil in the bud. Hijab is an important pillar in Islam's reform of the society. Hijab blocks the attractiveness of a woman from other men. That attractiveness has a very useful function within marriage but it is very destructive outside it. Islam offers a practical solution to the problem of immorality in society. Islam does not permit *khalwa* or "illegitimate seclusion" of men and women in society except in the case of legitimate relationships (such as a man's wife, mother, sister, daughter or aunts). Islam nips the evil in the bud because moral disasters always have preludes. Islam reduces such social situations in which those preludes can occur. If women follow Islamic standards of dress and conduct, the incidences of sexual harassment would become negligible and we will be able to eliminate a major source of oppression of women in society.

Today we know that the differences between the two genders are deeper than just the reproductive systems of women and men. The differences in men and women lie in

the brain and its structure. This difference is at the core of our being. No amount of social engineering can eliminate the differences between men and women. There are various case studies in the books of clinical psychology which bear testimony to this fact. Yes, men and women are equal but equality does not mean behaving like one another. Women have their own independent personalities, distinct from that of men.

An attempt has been made in this book to show that opposition to Islamic law and teachings is an opposition to science, as we can clearly see that science affirms an innate distinction between the sexes, a distinction that Allah commands us to celebrate, not to suppress. The social structure of Islam is quite different from that of the modern secular West although Western modern science itself affirms the truth of Islam regarding the inherent gender differences between men and women. It is a pity that in the Muslim world itself, modernist Islamic scholars, the secularists as well as the apologetics, are not aware of the new feminism and the emerging science of brain sex. From the religion-hostile governments of Turkey and Egypt to the emerging feminists in the Middle East to feminist women like Taslima Nasreem in Bangladesh or Fatima Mernissi of Morocco, all of them are still living in the epoch of old-age science and continue to insist that gender differences and inequalities in the workplace can be reversed with social engineering. However, no matter what feminist and social engineers do to change the nature of men and women, it comes back as the old Latin proverb states:

“Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque revenit”
(You can drive nature out with a pitchfork but she always comes back).

The Muslim Woman “Unveiled”

(A Poem about Hijab)

(By: Izdehar Albowyha)

You look at me and call me oppressed,
Simply because of the way I’m dressed,

You know me not for what’s inside,
You judge the clothing I wear with pride,

My body’s not for your eyes to hold,
You must speak to my mind, not my feminine mold,

I’m an individual, I’m no mans slave,
It’s Allah’s pleasure that I only crave,

I have a voice so I will be heard,
For in my heart I carry His word,

“O ye women, wrap close your cloak,
So you won’t be bothered by ignorant folk”,

Man doesn’t tell me to dress this way,
It’s a Law from God that I obey,

Oppressed is something I’m truly NOT,
For liberation is what I’ve got,

It was given to me many centuries ago,
With the right to prosper, the right to grow,

I can climb mountains or cross the seas,
Expand my mind in all degrees,

For God Himself gave us LIB-ER-TY,
When He sent Islam,
To You and Me.

Behind the veil I am the queen.
I have a body that few have seen.

Many people think I am oppressed-
And wonder how I got myself into this mess.

My veil is my cure.
And makes my heart pure.

It earns me my love from Allah my Lord.
And makes me strong against any sword.

Behind my beautiful veil lies.
My savior from the temptation of guys!

‘Behind my veil,’ I begin to say.
‘Is where I shall forever stay!’⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ Albowyha, Izdehar

(<http://sunninews.wordpress.com/2010/07/28/hijabnaqabveil-or-parda-the-symbol-of-modesty-of-muslim-girls>)

Appendix 1

Glossary of Islamic Terms

A.H. “After Hijra” – Designation for the Islamic lunar calendar which began on the day of Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) departure from Makkah to Madinah (equivalent to July, 622 C.E. – Common Era).

Allah The Arabic word “Allah” is equivalent to “God” in English. The word “Allah” is a proper and the true name of God, through which man calls upon God personally. The name “Allah” is not confined to Islam; it is also the name by which Arabic-speaking Christians of the Oriental churches call upon God.

Ansar The Muslims of Madinah who covenanted to assume responsibility for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and to give him their protection

‘Awrah The term *‘awrah* denotes parts of the body, for both men and women, that are not supposed to be exposed to others and they must be covered with clothing. The *‘awrah* of a woman in front of her *mahrams* such as her father, brother and nephew is her entire body except that which usually appears such as the face, hair, neck, forearms and feet. Women can (if necessary) show much more of their body to other women.

Ayah (pl. *ayaat*) a verse from the Qur’an

Burqa an outer garment often covering the face

Eid This refers to the two annual Islamic festivals – one of them (Eid al-Fitr) marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the other (Eid al-Adha) is the "Festival of Sacrifice" celebrated by Muslims to commemorate the willingness of Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to Allah, but instead was able to sacrifice a ram (by Allah's command).

Eman (Imaan) Faith or conviction that Allah is indeed the one and only God and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His last prophet

Fatwa a legal verdict issued by a qualified Islamic scholar on any matter pertinent to Islamic law.

Fiqh Islamic jurisprudence

Fitnah Trial or tribulation; a test; infatuation; temptation

Imam (also **Sheikh**) Title given to an Islamic scholar

Hadeeth (plural: Ahaadeeth) The collection of recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or the words and actions of others that he witnessed and silently approved. Famous authors of books of hadeeth include Bukhari, Muslim, Malik ("Al-Muwatta"), Abu Dawud, Nasai, Ibn Majah, Ahmed ibn Hanbal ("Musnad Ahmed"), Tirmidhi, Ibn Habban, and Al-Bayhaqi.

Hajj It refers to pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah once in a lifetime if one can afford it physically and financially. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Halal It refers to that which is lawful, for instance, income, personal activities, food and meat from animals that have been ritually slaughtered, etc. The opposite is haraam.

Haraam Refers to that which is unlawful and prohibited by Allah and for which He specified a penalty.

Hayaa Our natural sense of modesty and shame, which prevents one from any indecent acts

Ijtihad The process of making a legal decision by interpretation of the legal sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Jihaad Self-exertion in the cause of Allah

Jumuah Prayers Congregational *salaat* (prayers) performed in the masjid every Friday in the early afternoon. It is preceded by a *khutbaah* (sermon) by an Imam who leads the prayers after the sermon.

Kufr Disbelief in Allah.

Mahram A woman's mahram is her close male relative, i.e. any male that she is forbidden (to marry) due to a family-tie or some allowable reason. The same applies to men, i.e. their close female relatives whom they cannot marry. This forbiddance (of marriage) must also be endless, i.e. everlasting. So what does not fall into this category is the temporary (marital) forbiddance such as the wife's sister and the wife's paternal and maternal aunt (that is, these women are forbidden to a man for marriage, but only while

he remains married to his current wife). If a man is *mahram* to a woman, then she must not cover herself as completely as she does for non-*mahram* men.

Non-Mahram This category refers to all those males whom a woman is permitted to marry (e.g. a cousin or any stranger Muslim male) or a male whom it is forbidden to marry at that moment in time but may become permissible to marry in the future due to a change in circumstances. The same applies to women, i.e. all those women are non-mahram whom a man is permitted to marry at any moment in time.

Makrooh Disliked, hated or detested. It is used in reference to actions and deeds that are referred to negatively in the Islamic teachings.

Masjid Place where Muslims perform their congregational prayers, often rendered as “mosque”.

Mubaah Permissible

Nifaaq Hypocrisy

Niqab Face-veil of Muslim women; face-covering

Qiyaamah Day of Judgment.

Qur'an The Final Book that Allah revealed for mankind. The Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-three years to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Saheeh Authentic or sound. In the science of Hadeeth, it means authentic reports/traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Salaat The prescribed form of worship in Islam, which comprises of the acts of standing, bowing and prostrating before Allah.

Shari'ah Revealed law. The canonical law of Islam as put forth in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* and elaborated by Islamic scholars.

Shirk Polytheism, attributing partners with Allah. Opposite of *tawhid*

Sunnah It refers to the spoken and acted example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It includes what he approved, allowed, or condoned and what he himself refrained from and disapproved of.

Surah It refers to the chapters of the Holy Qur'an. There are a total of 114 surahs in the Qur'an, some of them are short while others are long.

Tafseer Commentary/explanation of the Qur'an

Taqwa To be conscious and fearful of Allah (To do what Allah said to do, and to avoid what Allah said to avoid)

Tawheed The doctrine of the "Oneness of God". This is a fundamental belief of Islam and all other beliefs and doctrines rest on the soundness of this tenet.

Ulama Islamic scholars

Ummah the nation or community as identified by its ideology, law, religion and culture

Zina illegitimate sexual relations

Zikr (Dhikr) Remembrance of Allah. Literally ‘remembrance’.

Appendix 2

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